

Ark Volume 17

Act 1: The Quest that Shouldn't have been Accepted!

Kyakak, kyakak, kyakak, kyakak!

A sound could be heard that irritated his peripheral nerve from all directions. At the same time, dozens of red eyes appeared in the darkness like street lights turning on. The area underneath the eyes split apart to show a red space. It was a huge mouth which would swallow Ark in one bite. The sharp fangs weren't visible in the mouth. Instead, small sharp projections like needles were densely packed on the tongue and glossy with saliva as it poked out. He had laughed when it first appeared. But now those features seemed like a horror move as it approached.

"Dammit.....!"

A moan emerged from Ark's mouth.

'I thought I could catch my breath.....'

Ark confirmed how much mana and health he had left. He had just finished fighting those guys. Thus he needed a rest to recover his health and mana. However, the prospect of success didn't look good so he had run away. But he had been surrounded again before he could. He currently only had 50% health and mana left. That wasn't the only serious problem.

"Damn, what the? Is there another way?"

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

His familiars' health was also in danger from the battle.

'It is impossible to fight them in this state. But.....!'

Ark moved his gaze and checked the surrounding area.

.....He had no choice.

While escaping from the battlefield, he hadn't taken terrain into account and just blindly proceeded. Now even the route backwards had disappeared. It was truly a dilemma. The path to retreat had disappeared because of the area's special terrain. It.....

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

The black forms narrowed the distance and shrieked. The monsters had a number of features that Ark hadn't seen before.

"Anyway, I don't have time to complain!"

Ark clenched Gwisal's sword firmly and raised his voice. It was the worse situation where he had to fight against dozens of monsters without a short rest! 'Do I have to become the food of those guys in this place?'

"Racard, use Taunt to lure those guys to the other side!"

"U-understood. I haven't brushed my teeth for two days so take this spit attack! Spit! Spit! Spit! Spit!"

Racard spat wildly all over the place and shouted. The black forms gathered around Ark turned their bodies. Racard freaked out at the ensuring sharp tongue and ran away. 5 of the black forms started chasing after Racard.

"Now Razak!"

Clack clack clack clack, ttadang!

Razak ran up to them at Ark's command. Razak powerfully swung his shield and hit three monsters before withdrawing.

"Dark Strike!"

Ark had stuck close to Razak's back and rushed out before striking with his sword. The darkness assimilated into the blade rushed out and dealt a critical hit. But after a brief moment, those guys gathered again.

“Heok!”

Ark hurriedly retreated behind the shield wielding Razak. The ensuing violent collision caused Razak to be pushed back several metres and he knelt down. While Razak tried to stand up again, the monster flew towards Razak and grabbed him. The confused Razak swung his sword and hit the fellow. But more of those guys surrounded him and Razak wasn't able to endure before falling down. Then they flocked like hyenas.

Kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang!

While Razak struggled to get up, those guys wrapped their sharp tongues around him. Razak's health was quickly drained by the tongues.

“Dammit.....Razak, summon off! Summon Demon!”

Razak disappeared and then re-appeared near Ark. Although the crisis was overcome, the situation was still serious. Razak had become like a rag after receiving the concentrated attack. His remaining health was only 15%. If the same situation repeated again then he wouldn't even last a minute.

‘But there is still a way to use Razak!’

“Steel Loyalty!”

Razak's body hardened and changed to steel. When Steel Loyalty was triggered, the amount of loyalty was converted to defense and then added to Razak's base defense. Even if his defense rose, his health was still the same. However, Razak's loyalty was 952. Even with 15%, the considerable addition of 952 defense meant it was possible for Razak to endure for a significant amount of time. Of course, Steel Loyalty did have one huge weakness. It was impossible to move while the skill was activated.

‘It is useful that an obstacle has formed between those guys.’

That was the reason why Ark summoned Razak again and used Steel Loyalty. The place Ark was fighting had no special terrain features. With

Razak turned to steel, it was possible to form a type of wall. In other words, he could reduce the enemy attacking from 4 sides to 3.

‘But even so.....’

It was only putting out a bit of the fire. The fact that he was surrounded by dozens of opponents didn’t change.

‘The problem now isn’t whether I live or die!’

Ark glanced uneasily at his body. Armour, gloves, shoes and cloak..... With just one look, he could tell that all his equipment was ragged. There was no time for an equipment check so the durability had reached the bottom. If the impossible battle continued then several of his equipment would be destroyed. That was the reason Ark couldn’t fight aggressively. He wanted to take off the equipment before dying but the battle had started before he had time to. In New World, it was impossible to change equipment aside from a sword and shield during a fight.

‘I need to find a chance to escape. I have no choice but to endure it and look for a way to escape.’

“Dark Blade! Dark.....cough!”

While using Razak as a wall, Ark received a sharp impact in his side. When the tongue covered in sharp projections struck his side, the edges immediately started bleeding. His vision started shaking while a message window appeared.

-You have received a ‘Blow.’ 300 damage!

<Until ‘Bleed’ is stopped, you will receive 4 damage every 10 seconds until the battle ends>

‘This is serious!’

Ark inwardly screamed with distress. 300 damage. He only had 50% health left so Ark couldn’t ignore the damage. However, Ark was in

distress because of that. He also was affected by 'Bleed,' making him lose 4 health every 10 seconds. The problem was the Bleeding. When blood appeared, the gaze of the opponents fixed on Ark. They smelled the blood! While they gathered around Ark, the opponents hadn't been overly aggressive. When surrounded by 20~30 monsters, Ark would instantly be turned into a dust cloth if they all attacked intensively. But they were monsters so they weren't organized. There were some fellows attacking the steel Razak while others were quite a distance away.

'Dammit! Of all things.....'

Ark rushed to make a 'Salve' using the Food Worshipper skill and stopped the Bleeding. But after they smelled the fresh blood, all of them flocked to Ark. It was literally a stampede.

'If I'm pushed like this than I'm screwed!'

If he was stamped on by those guys then his health as well as his equipment wouldn't survive.

"No, absolutely not! Riposte!"

Ark hit the tongue in front of him with an angry expression. He intended to push them to free up some space to move. However.....

Grrrrr.

Suddenly the tongue faded like fog. It was a special technique to avoid attacks, 'Transparent!' So his sword separated the sky in vain and he was hit in the chest by that tongue.

-You have been hit by a Counterattack. 400 damage!

<A penalty is applied for receiving a counterattack from Riposte>

Riposte was an attack which pushed the enemy back 10 metres. After receiving a counterattack for Riposte, the penalty was applied and Ark was thrown back 10 metres instead. Ark hurriedly stuck his sword down in the ground. Thanks to his fast reaction speed, the velocity that

he was pushed back decreased. But before he could sigh with relief, he felt something empty beneath his feet. Ark grabbed a protruding stone with surprise.

‘Oh my God!’

Ark who had barely stopped his momentum looked down with stunned eyes. Ark was standing unexpectedly on the edge of a cliff..... At the bottom, a river of boiling lava was flowing. The river of lava which stretched over 100 metres in the floating island with cracks in it was an surreal sight. The place Ark was hanging onto was the edge of that land. Although Ark was in a crisis, this was the reason why he couldn’t escape from the area. In order to move to another land mass, either jumping or flying was required. Just one mistake meant he would fall into the lava.....Dying like that wouldn’t be so bad. But in this situation, the fire damage would destroy his equipment which had low durability.

‘That absolutely can’t happen!’

Ark barely avoided diving into the lava by grabbing the protruding rock. However, he couldn’t be relieved just yet. While Ark was holding onto the stone rock, the monsters were approaching while swinging their tongues.

“M-Master!”

Racard belatedly realized the situation and screamed.

“Ah, that’s right. Racard, leave those fellows and lure the ones over here to the other side!”

“Eh? U-understood!”

Racard flew towards Ark at full speed. But that was a fatal mistake. Racard had lured 5 monsters using Taunt, so when he flew towards Ark than they also followed. Then they collided with the monsters gathered to attack Ark. There was no need to explain the results.

“Master, I came! Eh? Eh eh eh....heok!”

"You idiot! I told you to get rid of those guys.....wah!"

Ark belatedly grasped the situation and screamed but it was too late. Grrrrrr. Those guys gathered at the edge was pushed like dominos and fell into the lava. A few of them also collided with Ark and he let go of the stone rock thanks to the impact.

"I, I don't know. I just did what Master told me to!"

Racard shrunk away and tried to explain.

'D-dammit! I'm falling!'

Ark felt a sense of vertigo as his seen became black. He shouldn't have come to a place like this. No, before that.....

'If I knew this was such a disgusting place then I wouldn't have accepted the quest!'

-

"This fellow!"

A rock fell as he heard a booming voice. After turning his head he saw a huge monster.

"Stay away! This is the territory of the Fire Draconians. This isn't the place for a human!"

The giant form approached Ark. While the upper part was a body, the lower half was a completely alien form. With sharp claws on the four legs and flames wrapped around and scales stretching over the tail, it was unmistakably a dragon's body. And Ark had seen a monster with the same form before. Then Racard reacted before Ark.

"Hiik, V-Valderas!"

Racard screamed and quickly hid behind Ark. That's right. It was the final boss that appeared in the Event Quest, Valderas! But Ark realized

the monster who appeared here wasn't Valderas. Even if the monster revived for no reason, it was impossible for it to appear in this distant place. The more Ark looked closely, the more different it appeared from Valderas. Valderas was a warrior wearing plate armour who wielded a mace, while the monster that appeared on Hwaryong Mountain was wearing red leather armour. It also felt a bit small when compared to Valderas.

'Did it say Fire Draconian just then?'

Ark came here in order to complete the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest. In other words, the quest destination was Valderas' hometown. It was natural that there would be an existence which resembled Valderas. It was highly likely that the Fire Draconian in front of him was an NPC related to the quest. However, Ark still couldn't relax. Even if he received the quest, what guarantee did he have that the Fire Draconians would be friendly?

'Since it hasn't attacked yet, it doesn't seem to be that aggressive but.....'

Ark was the one who defeated Valderas. There was no guarantee how the Fire Draconians would react to the person who killed someone in the same clan.

'Should I check the atmosphere?'

Ark thought for a while. The Fire Draconian then lowered its upper body and asked.

"Valderas? Did you say Valderas just now?"

"Huh? That....."

Damn, did he hear Racard say the name Valderas just then? His eyes were quite sharp for someone so big. Ark glared at Racard sitting on his shoulder. Anyway, it was difficult prevaricate now that the name Valderas was heard.

‘I’ll just have to break through the front. Well, if that guy attacks then I’ll just take care of him like Valderas.’

Ark had already taken care of Valderas who was a Fire Draconian. Of course, there were thousands of users at that time and he fought the weakened Valderas underwater or else he would’ve had no chance of winning. But Ark had been level 75 at the time. Currently Ark was level 371. Even if it wasn’t underwater like with Valderas, he had confidence that he could win. Was there a reason for him to be scared? Ark considered and asked with a dignified attitude.

“Do you know Valderas?”

“Who are you to say his name?”

“I am Ark. A few years ago I came across Valderas and had no choice but to kill him with my own hands.”

“Really..... It was you? You defeated the revived Valderas?”

The Fire Draconian looked at Ark with new eyes. After a while, he sighed and rubbed his neck.

“I was passing through the southern part a while ago and listened to the news. Unfortunately, Valderas’ spirit which should’ve passed on a long time ago was resurrected to live a nightmare. But poor Valderas who had been captured by a curse was finally freed thanks to the brave actions of a human.”

The Fire Draconian shifted his gaze to Ark and spoke again.

“I am the oracle of the Fire Draconians, Lumines. As a Fire Draconian, I would like to express my gratitude for you.”

“Thank you?”

“You killed Valderas. But that is wrong. The great Fire Draconian warrior Valderas had died a long time ago. No, he was forced to disappear. It was a terrible curse which resurrected him again. Your act

of defeating Valderas broke the curse and sent his spirit to where it should've originally gone."

Valderas also said this just before he died. Lumines looked into the sky like he was recalling something and murmured.

"Valderas.....Valderas..... Although he is the clan's disgrace, he is also an object of sympathy. By released the wicked curse which was holding Valderas captive, you have restored his honour. As a spokesman of the Fire Draconians, I would like to express our regards and gratitude for your great achievement."

.....The talk seemed to be going well. Since the conversation was going well, Ark trembled and replied modestly.

"I just did what I had to."

"Humility is the greatest virtue of a human. But it is a pity."

"Huh?"

"You might not be aware of it but there is more meaning to the Fire Draconians behind your action of freeing Valderas' soul. Whether you want it or not, the Fire Draconians have an obligation to repay you."

"You don't have to go that far....."

Ark waved it off with his hand while his eyes sparkled. Lumines mentioned there was something meaningful about the death of Valderas but Ark was more interested in the 'price' of the repayment. Repayment price! Wasn't that a quest reward? The Fire Draconian was different from humans. In fantasy settings, a draconian was the symbol of honour!

'What kind of compensation will be given....?'

Ark was full of expectations but Lumines' words poured cold water on him.

“It is slightly regrettable. What you’ve done for the Fire Draconians is really great. If I had gold of jewellery than I would hand it all to you. But the glory of the Fire Draconians is nothing but a memory of the past. The only thing we have left is old armour and staffs.”

‘What the? All that expectation just for a horrible reward?’

Ark looked around with an absurd expression. Lumines looked at him with bittersweet eyes and started talking again.

“As an oracle of the Fire Draconians, I am allowed to give you the ‘Blessing of Fire.’ Come this way.”

‘Blessing of Fire?’

Ark followed Lumines until he stopped at a magic circle carved into the ground. Once the complicated magic in the centre of the circle was completed, Lumines struck it with his staff and shouted.

“I am the oracle of the Fire Draconians. I order the sacred fire which has existed since the beginning of the world! Those who are unqualified will be burned to ashes and disappear while those who are qualified will receive the Blessing of Fire. Come forth!”

Ku ku ku ku. Ku ku ku ku!

It was at that time. Suddenly there was a crack under Ark’s foot. He was surprised by the sudden situation and retreated. No, he tried to retreat but it was like his body was tied with a rope. Then a white flame which soared dozens of metres high swallowed Ark.

‘Huk, what, what the? That bastard surely didn’t.....!’

Ark looked at Lumines with shocked eyes. But Ark soon realized something strange. The flame which appeared from a crack on the floor was so hot it even melted rock. Yet Ark felt nothing from the flame. It wasn’t hot and there was no change to his health.

“What on earth is going on? What just happened?”

Ark murmured and looked at the fire wound around him with stupid eyes. Suddenly the fire around Ark's body started dancing and quickly surged into his mouth. His stomach felt hot for a moment before an information window appeared.

-You have received the 'Sacred Blessing of Fire' from the oracle of the Fire Draconians.

Although the Fire Draconians are classified as a draconian, their attribute is fire. They were born in fire and will continue to live as the guardians of fire. The oracle of the Fire Draconians has the power to use 'Blessing of Fire' on a chosen person. When the Fire Draconians were flourishing a long time ago, many heroes visited Hwaryong Mountain in order to obtain the Blessing of Fire.

<Permanent effects of Blessing of Fire: 20% Fire Resistance, 50% Burn Resistance>

'Ohhh, w-what is this?'

Ark read the information window with widened eyes. A permanent increase in flame resistance and burn resistance! Fire magic had the most destructive power among all magic. So a lot of magicians preferred to use fire magic. Thus it was important for warriors who fought against magicians to have fire resistance. Items which had fire resistance as a special option would sell for 1.5 times more expensive than similar items.

'To have the ability go up through this method.....!'

If he received fire resistance items then it was possible to sell it later on. However, the stats would disappear once the item wasn't equipped anymore. Previously Ark had worn the Veil of Fire cloak which gave 50% fire resistance but he ended up changing it. Naturally having the stat rise permanently was better than from a magic item.

'I thought he wouldn't give proper compensation but isn't this a jackpot?'

He had already halfway given up on the quest reward thanks to Lumines' words so it was like being hit in the back of the head. However, he would willingly be hit in the back of the head hundreds of times if it was like this!

"Thank you very much."

"It is a small thing compared to what you did."

Lumines smiled and shook his head. Ark was satisfied with the compensation and turned his body with a light feeling.

'Wait? Is this really the end of the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest?'

It was natural for Ark to be doubtful. Although it wasn't necessary to say again, quests were more than a simple request in RPG games. Quests were a story. Quests were a device that allowed users to experience various stories and worldviews of the game. Although the quest was solved and compensation received, it still wasn't completely cleared up. Then.....

'The <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest might not be completely finished!'

Ark had been playing New World for 2 years now. The content was still unclear but it was obvious that it was a connection quest. Then he went over his conversation with Lumines. There might've been a subtle hint within Lumines' dialog. If <Home of the Fire Draconian> leads to another quest then the rewards would definitely be better. It was possible to receive the Blessing of Fire again as a reward.....If that happened, his flame resistance would increase to +40% and burn resistance to 100%. It would be the jackpot of jackpots. Ark had the thought and quickly turned his body back around.

'I can't miss this opportunity! Given the overall situation, this should be a linked quest.'

And there were two types of connected quests. To 'receive' or to 'ask about it.'

‘I have to ask the NPC before I can receive the quest. Sometimes it was necessary to have a ‘keyword’ before the NPC would give out the information. The keyword needed.....’

The one for <Home of the Fire Draconian quest> was Valderas! Then the keyword for the linked quest so be something related to Valderas. Ark reached such a conclusion and quickly suggested to Lumines.

“I was wondering one thing.”

“What it is?”

“I heard that Valderas was a wonderful Lord before.”

“Yes, that’s right. He was a great Lord.”

“Then why did Valderas become a subordinate of the Dark Lord?”

“T-that.....”

Lumines made a confused expression.

“If it is you.....you’re qualified to hear this.”

After closing his mouth and thinking for a long time, Lumines sighed and started talking.

“Originally.....Valderas was a guardian who protected the shrine of the Fire Draconians. No, he was about to become the guardian. But all the misfortunes started when the guardian went on a pilgrimage in accordance to the rules of the Fire Draconians.”

While Lumines was originally hesitant, now that he started then he continued babbling on. Frankly, Ark didn’t have that much interest in the history of Valderas and the Fire Draconian. Unfortunately, he couldn’t skip the dialogue of NPCs in New World so he was forced to listen. According to Lumines’ words, the person selected as guardian was entrusted with going around to the shrines built all over the continent to receive the fire blessings.

“At that time, the oracle wanted to delay the pilgrimage.”

“How come?”

“At the time, there had been rumours about deformed monsters showing up at sacred Fire Draconians sites all over the continent. I suspect it was an omen of the precursor to the Dark Century. And at that time, the guardian was weakened from old age and couldn’t perform his duties anymore. A new guardian was needed quickly.”

So despite the Oracle’s worries, the Fire Draconians chose some youths as candidates to become the guardian and they went on the pilgrimage. The person elected as the leader of the pilgrimage was Valderas. Unlike previous anxieties, the pilgrimage trip was smooth. After the pilgrimage left and 1 year had passed, they arrived at the southern part of the continent. When the pilgrimage arrived there, they witnessed a horrific scene. The deaths of so many lives had devastated the earth! It was the doing of demons from the north. Valderas’ sense of justice couldn’t pretend not to see it. Valderas and the pilgrimage resolved to fight the deformities and finally defeated the demon Magura. In the aftermath of the long battle, everything around them was ashes and ruins.

“Valderas had to make a choice. Either lead the Draconians and continue the pilgrimage or stay and take care of the residents in the area.”

“.....He decided to remain.”

Ark nodded and murmured. After hearing that, he could guess the rest of what happened next. Lumines nodded and replied.

“Yes. Valderas chose to remain and become the Lord. Although he was a guardian candidate, he didn’t only think of himself. Valderas restored the territory with the Fire Draconians that remained. That land is now the Jackson territory.”

“Then how did Valderas become a subordinate of the Dark Lord?”

Ark tilted his head to one side and asked. Lumines sighed and replied in a pained voice.

“Valderas....no, no one could imagine. It was the appearance of the evil Magura. And Magura’s death. It was all a scheme that the Dark Lord arranged.....”

“Scheme?”

“Yes, it was a scheme. It was frighteningly effective.....!”

It had been several years since Valderas became the Lord of Jackson. After the territory had stabilized, Valderas came back to the home cite Dragonian. He was to be punished for forsaking the guardian position and abandoning the pilgrimage. But the Fire Draconians knew the circumstances and welcomed him warmly. And their congratulations to the Lord Jackson were sincere. Valderas confirmed that his decision was wrong and went to sleep among the Draconians feeling happy. But that night.....Valderas had a terrible nightmare. In the dream one of the Fire Draconians was engulfed in madness and broke into the shrine, killing the guardian and destroying the wards before slaughtering the rest of his kinsmen. Valderas screamed and woke up. Then he realized something. The scene he saw wasn’t a dream.....

“It wasn’t a dream.....?”

“Everything he saw in a dream actually happened. It wasn’t someone else but Valderas who had committed the crime. No, to be exact it was the influence of Magura.”

“Evil influence of Magura? But Magura and Valderas.....”

“.....He thought he defeated it. Everyone believed it. But it was all the scheme of Magura to make the Dark Lord descend to earth.”

At that time, there was a book called the ‘Immortal Book’ seal in the shrine of the Fire Draconians. It was an ancient artifact which passed down the secret to immortal life. Magura needed the Immortal Book to make the Dark Lord descend to his world.

“So Magura pretended to die and hid in Valderas’ body for a chance.”

Valderas realized too late and was already enveloped in anger and insanity. Anger and insanity was the food that the darkness loved the most.

“Besides, Valderas had been secretly influenced by Magura for 10 years. The moment Valderas became irrational, his soul was completely captured by Magura and the darkness. He died a hero’s death at that moment.”

“Then you are the last survivor of the Fire Draconians?”

“That’s true but it could also be not true.”

“Huh?”

When Ark made a doubtful expression, Lumines clenched his teeth tightly and continued.

“The terrible evil controlling Valderas wasn’t satisfied with the mere destruction of the Fire Draconians. That fellow trapped their souls within the ruins for hundreds of years.”

Ark looked at Lumines with eyes that indicated he didn’t understand.

‘If the souls of the Fire Draconians are stuck then why are you here?’ his expression seemed to ask.

Lumines sighed and shook his head.

“Originally Dragonian was a Holy Land where is protected by wards. In order for Magura to infiltrate it, he had to use Valderas. By killing his kin, the wards were corrupted and allowed Magura in.”

It was located inside the black dome on Hwaryong Mountain. After being violated by Magura, the attribute of the wards completely changed. It now had the demonic property. Ark realized that Lumines was wrapping up his talk.

“In the end, there are two ways the souls of the Fire Draconians can be saved.”

One way was to reset Magura's corruption and reset the wards to their original form. However, Magura hid somewhere after the incident.

'The first method is impossible at the moment.'

The second way was to enter through the wards directly and kill the demons who had captured the souls of the Dire Draconians. But that was also impossible to achieve in the present state. Thanks to the demons' unexpected addition, even the Draconians couldn't enter the ward.

'If I can't enter then it is also impossible. But.....'

However, Ark felt doubtful at this part. Just before Lumines arrived, Ark had touched the black dome. Unlike what Lumines said, he felt like his finger was being sucked in.

"Why did my hands enter when I touched it?"

"S-such a thing? The wards....."

"Is it true? Take a look."

Ark put his hand on the black dome and spoke again. Then Lumines made an absurd expression like he suddenly remembered something.

"Maybe.....no, I think it should work!"

"Huh?"

"Didn't you previously say that you were brought here because of Valderas' insignia? Can you show it to me?"

Ark pulled out Valderas' insignia without thinking about it. But then Lumines took the insignia and a spark occurred? Lumines looked up with a convinced expression.

"That's it. It is this!"

"Eh? What is it?"

“Isn’t this Valderas’ insignia? And Valderas is a person who had been corrupted by Magura’s magic. This insignia also contains Magura’s magic.”

“.....So I’m not affected by the wards because this contains Magura’s magic.....?”

“There is no reason for a backlash against the same type of magic.”

‘Valderas.....’

All the fragmented information Ark knew then connected. At the start, the Valderas left in the medal wanted to return home. Ark had thought it was just a part of the game. But there was an inevitable reason he wanted to go there. Just before dying, Valderas had escaped from the dark chains that tied him. At the same time he recalled all his memories. He left the key to enter the wards as well as the fate of the Fire Draconians to the hero who defeated him. It really was a pity the Fire Draconians didn’t know that about Valderas.

‘Which reminds me, Lumines never once spoke badly about Valderas.’

Anyway, it became clear what Ark had to do. The next step was to enter and save the souls of the Fire Draconians. That was the next part of the <Home of the Fire Draconian> quest.

“It’s not a coincidence that Valderas left this to me. It was his last will. So I will enter the wards and fight against Magura’s power to save the souls of the Fire Draconians.”

“Y-you will really do that?”

Lumines looked at Ark with eyes overflowing with expectation. Ark nodded without hesitation and the quest information window instantly appeared.

-The quest has been updated.

The Suffering Souls of the Fire Draconians (Special Quest).

After receiving the guidance of Valderas' insignia, you have arrived at Hwaryong Mountain. And you have heard about the Fire Draconians' tragic history from its only survivor, Lumines. Even after the souls died hundreds of years ago, they are even now suffering from the wards. Magura who is the main culprit in all events had his subordinates restrain the Fire Draconians. While defeating Magura's subordinates, you should look for and free the Fire Draconians' souls.

<Difficulty: ??? Quest Restriction: Completion of the preceding quest 'Home of the Fire Draconians,' possession of the Lord of Darkness Valderas' Insignia. Level 300 or more>

"I don't know why we have to find such an annoying thing."

Racard waiting on the side complained with disgruntled eyes. Of course an NPC wouldn't understand the viewpoint of a user who deliberately hunted down difficult work.

"Shut up. It is natural to want to help when seeing someone in difficult circumstances."

"Hah? Did Master have such a character?"

Naturally he didn't have such a character. The reason that Ark risked his life on quests was for the profit. At first, Ark thought it was a jackpot if he received the Blessing of Fire again. At first, Ark thought it would be a jackpot if he received the Blessing of Fire again. But after seeing the contents of the quest, he grasped that it was different from the previous quest he received from the insignia. It was a quest to release the souls of the Fire Draconians who had been suffering for hundreds of years!

'The reward will be much more extravagant!'

Anyway, Ark understood the information from Lumines' words and instantly accepted the quest. Within the influence of the black sphere, a

‘space of chaos’ was created. Since the wards were influenced by the power of darkness, wicked souls were drawn in the space of chaos.

“But the identities of the subordinates Magura placed inside is still unknown. They are all huge.....

“Don’t worry, I’ll figure out a way once I go inside Dragonian.”

Ark answered with a light tone. At this point, Ark had just been thinking about the bonus quest. He judged that a quest linked to the level 120 restricted quest wouldn’t be that difficult. Ark finished the suitable preparations and moved inside the wards. At first he felt a repulsive force but he was instantly drawn into the wards when he took out the insignia.

-The Lord of Darkness Valderas’ Insignia has qualified you to enter this dark restricted area.

After a long time, it felt like he foot was stepping on mud. How many metres did he walk? Suddenly Racard’s cry rang in his ear.

“Hik, Master. The ground, the ground! Stop!”

“What? Why.....heok!”

Ark stared at the ground and flinched before retreating. In front of him was a cliff dozens of metres high.

“Is this the space of chaos Lumines talked about?”

Ark looked around stupidly. The dark space had rivers of lava flowing. Just like an asteroid belt, it was thousands of floating lands stretching over hundreds of metres. Looking at the landscape caused a sense of fear but also mystery and magnificence. However, the first emotion that surfaced on Ark’s face wasn’t fear but annoyance.

“Is this land mass the place called Dragonian?”

Ark really felt like it was a game after entering this space. In order to pass through the chaos space, he had to calculate the speed and direction of the land masses before jumping.

“I don’t really like this type of game.....”

That wasn’t the only reason Ark was irritated.

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

Then Ark was surrounded by a group of monsters. Forty dark auras began rising from the ground. Their silhouette resembled a monkey while they had red eyes and sharp projections on their tongues which dragged on the ground. It was a level 300~350 monster called Wendigo. It was the parasitic monsters feeding on the chaos space that Lumines mentioned.

“Hasn’t this become more troublesome?”

The Wendigo with its spirit body was the type of monster that Ark disliked the most. It was a monster with an insubstantial body like a spectre. Although all monsters were different according to its body, they normally invalidated 50~80% of physical attacks. Of course, using Elemental Sword made it slightly better but it was difficult to hunt compared to normal monsters.

‘I still don’t know what type of compensation.....’

But the wendigoes were level 300~350. Meanwhile Ark was over level 370. The level difference was large but at the same time it was possible to receive good loot and experience from hunting them. Even with a 50 level difference, he could still get 50% of experience from hunting.

‘But why are there so many of them?’

Whenever he moved to a land of suitable size, the wendigoes would appear. Furthermore, their numbers were proportional to the land mass. The larger land mass meant that more of them would appear. Every time he moved to one region then he had to check his

equipment, so it took many hours to only move a few regions. That wasn't the only problem.

Kuaaaa!

"Phew, I've cleared this one already. Damn!"

Ark cursed as he saw another group of wendigoes. Ark's destination was the Fire Draconian's city, Dragonian.

'Dragonian is probably at the end of the chaos space. I entered from the east so I had been heading to the west, but the land that I was approaching changed just now.....'

That was the problem. The chaos space wasn't a fixed location. If he wanted to get to another region then he had to move across before the land changed. If he made a mistake then he would go to the wrong place. However, it was hard to take notice of the timing to move when he had to concentrate on the fight. If he lost the timing then he would have to wait until the land came around again. Well, it is irrelevant since he could hunt while waiting. But the wendigoes were monsters who didn't give loot. Ark started to think it was a waste of time.

'Damn, it can't continue like this. At this rate I can't be assured that I will reach Dragonian in a few days.'

In the end, Ark decided the wendigoes were annoyances and decided to ignore them. It was common for users to ignore the monster and move directly to the destination in low level areas. However, this judgment brought about the worst results. In the beginning, there were small rocks so not that many wendigoes appeared. He hadn't considered it a problem. However, the land masses became increasingly larger so the number of monsters increased. Eventually 30~40 wendigoes appearing was normal! The number of monsters that approached whenever he landed wasn't a small amount. Therefore Ark ended up being surrounded by wendigoes. After being pursued, he ended up cornered and hanging on the edge of a cliff. Because Racard led the wendigoes stampeding over, he let go of the rock.

'It is the end if I fall. Not only will the land I took ages travelling over reset but my equipment will be destroyed. If I fall into the lava then three or four equipment will be destroyed!'

The loss of all his equipment would be over 20 million won! No matter what type of compensation he received from the quest, it would be a 100% deficit!

"Dammit, I shouldn't have accepted this quest!"

.....It was too late for regrets.

Act 2: Using a Crisis as an Opportunity!

'This is the end!'

His expression instantly became dark. It became dark the moment he let go of the protruding rock. He would be turned to powder the moment he touched the lava. However, he had no regrets about his life. But if his armour broke.....

'That absolutely can't happen. A way, I need to find a way! A foothold.....'

But nothing could be seen in the area. At that moment he heard Racard's voice over his head.

"I-it's not my fault! Isn't that right? Isn't it?"

'That bastard! Are you a government employee? A politician? Why are you saying such things in a situation like this?'

You're trying to avoid responsibility when your Master is about to dive into lava? Wasn't it just like government officials blaming each other in a state of emergency? Sometimes he really wanted to step on that person's mouth. That was when he had a thought. There was an intense spark inside of Ark.

‘Wait? Step on? Racard?’

Ark came up with a brilliant idea to save the situation. He considered it an absurd method but there was no time to think about it. As soon as Ark came up with a way, he raised his head and shouted.

“Racard, summon release! Racard, summon demon!”

“Huk, what, what the?”

Racard who had been claiming his innocence from a distant place disappeared. Ark recalled Racard back to his side and grabbed him.

“Hik! W-why are you doing this? Do you intend for us to die together? No, I don’t want to!”

“Who is intending to die with you? Shut up and stay still!”

Ark shouted angrily and placed Racard underneath his foot. Then he stepped on Racard’s head and used all his power to push off.

“Jump!”

It was the Jump option attached to his Wolf’s Feet! When Ark used Jump, his thighs swelled up and he used explosive power to push off Racard’s head. When he used a springboard, it allowed Jump to make up the remaining metres and he managed to grab the protruding stone again. But Racard who had become a foothold screamed as he was forced to fall towards the bottom. He hadn’t suspected Ark’s ulterior motive but he desperately flapped his wings to avoid falling into the lava the moment his head was stepped on.

“Ack, my head! Ack, my butt! I’m going to die!”

“Shut up, hurry up and lure those wendigoes away from here!”

“What? What? You dare say that now? Don’t you see that my butt is on fire?”

“Do you really want to fall into the molten lava?”

Kwa kwa kwang!

Then the rock was struck by one of the wendigoes' tongue. Ark quickly moved to another rock before growling at Racard.

"If I fall again then I'll grab you and bring you with me no matter what. Definitely!"

"Okay! I understand! Ya, you damn tongue ghost demons!"

Racard rubbed his butt to put out the fire and used Taunt on the wendigoes. After Racard lured the wendigoes away, Ark could climb up onto the land again. He had managed to avoid having his equipment melted in the lava for the moment. But that was it. There were still dozens of wendigoes swiping with their tongues in front of him and his health and the durability of his equipment was at the very bottom.

'It is better than falling into the lava but my equipment will still be destroyed when fighting against the wendigoes. I have to concentrate on finding a way to escape!'

Now the important thing wasn't to win but to move another land mass when it approached. Ark considered and put away his sword. His sword had low durability like his other equipment but putting it away could raise his evasion rate. Without his sword, he could concentrate everything on evasion.

"Dark Dance!"

Hwiririg, kwa kwa kwang! Hwiririg, kwa kwa kwang!

The bloody tongue with sharp needles passed closely by. Even with his evasion raised to 100%, he couldn't escape all attacks.

'Just one attack would decrease my durability.'

It also had its limits. It was raining and his clothes were wet. Even minor damage couldn't be ignored. After approximately 3~4 minutes passed, a red warning message popped up in front of Ark.

-The durability of 『Guardian Armour of the Merpeople』 , 『Cat Paws』 , 『Raccoons Pith』 and 『Warrior's Transcripts』 has decreased to 2%.

Immediate repair is needed!

‘Oh my god!’

It felt like his heart had suddenly fallen. In this situation it was easier for the durability of armour to fall more easily. It was the same principle as the loose screw would fall more often. If his equipment was at 2% then one hit would be a fatal blow!

“Master, it is coming!”

Then Racard's voice who had lured the wendigoes to the other side could be heard. When he turned around, a piece of land was fast approaching. It was a piece only 1 metre in diameter but Ark felt like it was his saviour.

‘If I miss that then it is the end!’

Ark quickly calculated the orbit of the approaching land. If it maintained its orbit then it would pass by in a few seconds! But the surrounding wendigoes can't see him move to the other land!

‘I have to get away from these guys first!’

Ark became determined and used Dark Dance to move between the wendigoes. The wendigoes followed behind Ark. Then Ark ran perpendicularly and moved towards Razak who was still using Steel Loyalty.

‘That's it, this is my last chance!’

“Razak, Steel Loyalty off! Transform!”

Clack clack clack clack, ttadadadak!

Razak instantly changed into the Saw blade and Ark caught it. Ark ran towards the edge and jumped with his full power. The tongues of the wendigos tried to follow but Ark quickly twisted the Saw blade.

Chwararak!

The Saw blade unfolded like a whip and entwined around the rapidly approaching piece of land. Ark dangled from the fast moving land and passed over the head of the wendigos. He didn't know where the land was going but he had avoided the worst situation for the moment.

"I-I lived!"

Ark looked at the rapidly retreating wendigos and sighed with relief. No, he was about to sigh.

Kukyakyakyakya!

Suddenly cold laughter was heard above his head. Ark lifted his face and stiffened. Before he could feel relieved, a wendigo had appeared on the piece of land. The wendigo that appeared brandished their tongues and attacked Ark. Ark moved side to side to avoid the tongues but then the wendigo's eyes focused on the Saw blade.

'D-dammit.....!'

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Currently the Saw blade was hanging from a corner of the piece of land. If that guy broke the corner with their tongues then Ark would fall into the lava again. It wasn't possible to pull his blade like a rubber band to climb up. If he flew up there was a 100% chance of collision with that guy and Ark would fall into the lava.....it was indeed the end.

'The only way.....!'

"Racard, above! Block that guy!"

"Huh? O-okay! Dark Dash!"

Racard shot forward like an arrow at Ark's words. But the floating land was moving at a tremendous speed. Racard used Dark Dance but the speed of the land was slightly faster. He had no way of blocking the wendigo. The wendigo only took light damage and brought its tongue back to the corner.

"D-damn, no! Soul Extortion!"

Ark hastily fired the only long distance attack he had. There was no other way! But Soul Extortion exerted an unforeseen effect.

Pepepepeng!

The moment the transparent hand grabbed the wendigo, there was a violent explosion and the wendigo stumbled. Instead of just tearing a part of the soul, it grabbed the whole thing? Furthermore, the wendigo's health was reduced by 15% with one blow.

'W-what is this? What is going on?'

Ark was dumbfounded by the unexpected situation. He used it in his desperate state but Soul Extortion wasn't an attack magic. It was a magic which grabbed some of the soul. Naturally it only did 50 damage. So why did the wendigo lose 15% health when it was caught by Soul Extortion?

"I don't know why but this is a chance! Before it can use the tongue again, Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!"

Pepepepeng, kuaack! Pepepepeng, kuaack!

Ark focused on the tongues and extensively used Soul Extortion. Every time the wendigo screamed as their bodies were slowly destroyed. But the wendigo was very tough. Even after being hit, the wendigo continued beating the corner with their tongues. However.....

Tick.

".....?"

Tick, tick, tick, tick!

The wendigo stopped tapping the edge with their tongue and looked at Ark with confusion. Ark laughed at their expression and muttered.

“Kukukuku, isn’t the wendigo quite cute like this?”

The wendigo swung their tongue around the floating land. But the wendigo already looked completely different from before. The exact reason was unknown but Soul Extortion tore off some of the wendigo’s body. But the wendigo had a spirit body so it quickly repaired everything. Yet even with a spirit body, the wendigo couldn’t repair everything without a penalty. The spirit body had a fixed amount so decreasing the soul would decrease the size of the body. The wendigo which had lost a lot of its soul due to Soul Extortion had decreased to the size of a fist. Now the wendigo didn’t have enough power to crush the corner.

Kiiiiik, kiiiiik!

The wendigo belatedly realized the situation too late and retreated.

“What are you going to do now? Soul Extortion!”

In the end, the little wendigo was completely swallowed up by the hand.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!

<Spiritual Power +1>

--

“Hahaha, now I can relax!”

Ark muttered with a rapt expression.

-The fatigue of your mind and body has been swept away by the hot spring.

<Your wound have been cured and health and mana recovery increased by 200%>

The chaos space wasn't a completely perilous place. There were also lands with hot springs floating among the river of lava. The spa area floated among the chaos space. If the hot spring was used as a campsite then naturally his recovery rate would quicken. It was also a safety zone where wendigoes wouldn't appear.

"It's lucky that there are hot springs here."

Soaking in the steaming hot water really loosened his fatigue. And the location where the hot spring wandered was the chaos space. Below it was a river of boiling lava. It was fantastic scenery to watch while floating around. It was also possible to relax in places like hot springs in New World.

Clack clack clack clack.....

Ssak ssak ssak ssak.....

Ark laughed as Razak and Radun also plunged into the hot springs with fascinated expressions.

"Chet, chet! You must be enjoying this."

However, Racard just frowned and glared at Ark.

"What the, what did you say? Why are you so dissatisfied?"

"Do you need to ask? Am I a stone? Why did you step on my head?"

"It couldn't be helped at that time."

"Ha, is that it? Is that all I am to Master? I almost fell into the lava because Master stepped on me. Did you see it? My butt caught on fire and all my fur was stripped! Do you have any remorse after seeing this?"

“That’s why I brought you to the hot spring. Come quickly into the springs.”

“How can you just say that? My butt is blistered from burns yet you want me to enter hot water?”

“You really are so troublesome. If you don’t want to come in then scout or something.”

“Master really is.....”

“What? What are you about to say?”

When Ark glared at him, Racard pouted and turned his head. He seemed annoyed but Ark’s head was full of other thoughts.

‘It’s fortunate that I came to a land with some hot springs.....’

In fact, the hot spring Ark was resting in this time wasn’t the first one he found. He had found a hot spring soon after he entered the chaos space. Yes, after all his troubles Ark returned back to the area where he found it and entered the hot springs. But that was not the problem.

“What was that? That attack just then?”

Ark carefully thought about the situation. Ark had tested the Soul Extortion skill on various monsters after he learnt it. And he came to the conclusion that it was ‘spirit.’ Even if it contributed to his Spiritual Power, it only raised it by 1. Despite frantically using during the week he spent in Hwaryong Mountain, his Spiritual Power had only increased by 7. So Ark only used Soul Extortion for half of its purpose.

‘But it had a completely different use just then.’

The wendigo lost 15% health when he used Soul Extortion. The wendigo didn’t have low health. If the wendigo’s health was low then he wouldn’t have so much trouble.

‘If it’s not an accident then I can only think of one answer!’

Ark ended up reaching a conclusion.

‘If my idea is correct.....’

After coming to the conclusion it wasn’t possible for him to sit down anymore.

“Come on, get up!”

“Eh? Already? But the swelling on my butt hasn’t gone down yet!”

Racard muttered as he grabbed his butt.

“Forget about your butt. Let’s go. The place isn’t that far away so just follow.”

“The place isn’t far away? Where are we going?”

“To test something out. Racard, look for a land of suitable size that I can move to immediately. The size....something 5~7 metres wide should be suitable. If it’s that size then only 4~5 wendigoes should appear.”

“Sheesh, I understand.”

Racard flapped his wings and looked all over the place. After a while, he finally discovered a suitable sized land.

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

As expected, the wendigoes appeared as soon as he arrived on the land.

‘5 of them should be suitable.’

“Razak, defense stance. Racard, taunt 3 of them!”

“What are you saying? You want me to lure them in a small place like this?”

Although Racard complained, he used Taunt to lure 3 of them to a corner. And Razak stood close to Ark with his shield outstretched. It was the basic formation of Ark and his summons. In fact, it wasn’t

necessary to prepare anything when dealing with these numbers but Ark's purpose wasn't to kill the wendigos. Ark used Razak and his shield to avoid the tongue while keeping an eye on the wendigos. After a while, an arrow pattern appeared on top of a wendigo's head.

"Lock on. Soul Extortion!"

Pepepepeng, kuaaaaak!

A clear hand stretched out in front of him and grabbed the wendigo. Although it recovered its spirit and body, the size of the wendigo had diminished. The wendigo became smaller with every attack of Ark's. He also confirmed that the damage decreased when the size became smaller.

"It is following my expectations. Next.....Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!"

Ark rampaged with the skill and struck the wendigo. Soul Extortion decreased the defense by 15%. Moreover, Soul Extortion had no cool down time. And it didn't take longer than 30 seconds to use the skill once. So he managed to take care of 5 wendigos.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!

<Spiritual Power +1>

"As expected!"

Ark was convinced once the message window popped up. In RPG games, the damage wasn't just decided by defense and attack power. The attack and defense power displayed in the information window was just an average figure. How it was applied depended on the situation. It was commonly known as attribute. The wendigo was a soul monster while invalidated physical attacked by 50~80%. Yet Ark had overlooked one important fact. Soul Extortion was literally soul magic. And he was dealing with a monster with a soul body. When used on a normal monster, the amount of damage and soul absorbed wasn't that much.

‘Soul Extortion is a skill which shows its primary effect when hunting soul monsters!’

Once confirmed by the experiment, Ark’s attitude changed 180 degrees. Before now Ark had only thought about heading to Dragonian. He had thought it was a waste of time to hunt the wendigoes.

“But if I use Soul Extortion on the wendigoes then I can extract dozens of Spiritual Power. Then.....”

Ark’s eyes widened. The quest wasn’t a problem anymore. It wasn’t necessary to say but the amount of Spiritual Power wasn’t something to be disregarded. Yet he couldn’t put stat points into Spiritual Power and he hadn’t seen an item to increase it. In the end, Soul Extortion was the only way to increase his Spiritual Power. Although it had seemed inefficient, he used Soul Extortion in his desperate situation.

“After changing to my 2nd profession, my skills require even more Spiritual Power. But Soul Extortion only increases by 1 so it would take several days to increase it by one hundred.....”

So this place was where he could get the maximum effect for Soul Extortion. Furthermore, there were so many wendigoes in the chaos space that it was almost tedious. If he hunted all the wendigoes here using Soul Extortion then how much would his Spiritual Power increase by?

“I need to grind to raise my Spiritual Power.

Amazing.....this is a jackpot!”

Ark felt like dancing. He could solve his problem of increasing his Spiritual Power here.

“If it is 3~4 opponents like now then hunting won’t be a problem.....”

The problem was when dozens of wendigoes emerged in a wide place. If there are 30~40 in a limited space then he could use Blade Tempest but it

would still be difficult. It wasn't necessary to say but he had to use Soul Extortion in order to increase his Spiritual Power by 1.

"Should I reduce the number and then absorb the rest of them?"

But the wendigos were similar to cockroaches even if there was a limit on their numbers. Of course, he could be killing wendigos forever. When he killed 5 wendigos he only received 1 spiritual power.

'That absolutely can't happen. Despite these monsters giving a bonus, he couldn't just rush in to kill them. He had to squeeze even 1 Spiritual Power using Soul Extortion. But to deal with 30~40 wendigos in a limited space....."

Ark looked at his summons. Racard could only lure 5 monsters using Taunt. That left 25~35 opponents left. Ark wouldn't be able to deal with the remaining wendigos even with Razak helping. He had to think outside the box.

"I need to have Racard somehow lure half of them....."

Ark murmured until he had a brilliant flash in his mind. He stared at Racard for a moment before smiling.

"Aha, why did I forget about that?"

"What? Why? Why are you looking at me with those eyes?"

Racard averted his gaze with unease at Ark's expression. Then Ark turned his head and showed off his neck.

"Racard, suck my blood!"

"Eh? Really? I can eat? Really? It's not a joke?"

"Don't talk nonsense and just suck!"

"Ohhhhh, understood. I definitely won't be in trouble later on?"

Suck, suck, suck, suck.

Racard instantly flew to him and bit his neck.

‘Ugh, this dirty feeling..... But.....Huhuhu, today’s suffering is tomorrow’s prosperity. Slaughtering a huge number of wendigoes won’t be a problem if I follow this plan. These damn monkey ghosts will die. I’ll catch you and devour you all!’

Ark’s face became pale as blood drained from him.

--

“Oh, I’m dizzy.....”

He naturally frowned as he experienced dizziness. He had anaemia because Racard sucked his blood thirteen times.

“Still, it is lucky that he succeeded on the thirteenth time.....”

Anyway, Ark’s accomplished his purpose on the thirteenth try. Ark brought his preliminary preparations to an end and started his wendigo hunt.

“Now shall I begin?”

Ark looked at the approaching land and laughed. As soon as he stepped on the land mass that was 50 metres, black energy started to rise from the ground. With a black form and red pupils, it was the wendigoes! The space soon filled with 30 wendigoes as they surrounded Ark. At any other time Ark would be filled with tension. But this time his mouth overflowed with saliva from the anticipation.

“Huhuhu, give me Spiritual Power!”

Ark instantly showed his teeth when the wendigoes appeared.

“I’ll grab and eat all of you!”

Kukyakyakyakya, kukyakyakyakya!

The 30 wendigoes shrieked as they responded to his voice and ran up to him. Ark wiped at the saliva on his teeth and smiled.

“Racard, it’s starting! Use your Blood-sucking skill!”

“Ohhhh, Blood-sucking skill activate!”

Racard opened his wings and flew from behind Ark. Then he was wrapped in a blue light as he used the skill. Then the ring of light moved up and down Racard’s body before it turned into the shape of a bat. The ring of light split into three. Then four bats flew around the wendigoes and shouted.

“These trivial boogeymen, if you’re hungry then eat my shit!”

The wendigoes flinched and stopped moving. Their eyes followed Racard before the shrieked and started running after him. Then Racard laughed and flew upwards before laughing.

“Cherish your life and run away!”

The three bats scattered at Racard’s order.

While some ran away, others shook their hips and laughed before running away. The wendigoes scattered as well and started running after the bats.

“Huhuhu, this is an easy method.....”

Ark watched the scene with a warm expression. This was the method Ark devised to deal with the wendigoes. Just use the ‘ Vampire ’ skill card, ‘ Moon illusion ’ is a way to light fires.

‘There is no place to hide from the number of wendigoes here so all I can rely on is Racard’s Taunt. But Racard could only lure 5 monsters with Taunt. Racard wouldn’t be able to draw all the wendigoes away.’

Then Ark came upon the idea of using Moonlight Illusion. Wouldn’t it be different if he could increase the number of Racard? If it was to lure the wendigoes then it didn’t matter if Ark was the one who used

Moonlight Illusion. But the problem was there was no place to run away from the wendigoes. The alter egos created by Moonlight Illusion didn't have any battle ability. If he tried to go around in such a small place then they would be caught by the wendigoes and destroyed. However, Racard's alter ego could fly so it was different. It was possible to avoid the attacks from the wendigoes without worrying about the limited space and terrain.

'If I use Racard's Blood-sucking skill then there is no need to wait for the cool down time!'

Originally Moonlight Illusion was a skill that was only available once a day. But just like when he used Slime's Time, the restrictions didn't apply with Racard's Blood-sucking skill.

"If I use this method then I won't have to suffer."

He thought as the stupid wendigoes ran after Racard. However, Ark still didn't take anything for granted. If he just went directly to Dragonian that he wouldn't need to devise such a strategy. The game was a place where some laws of reality still applied. When Racard and his alter egos flew around the area, 20 wendigoes chased after them so 10 were left. It was still a lot of opponents even when the numbers decreased by 1/3rd. If the 10 of them turned into one solid mass and rushed him then he would risk being pushed off the cliff like before. However, Ark already took precautions against that.

"They're surging! Razak, defense stance! Prepare for impact!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak stood in front of Ark with his shield in front of him and took a stable stance. With one foot forward and the other back, it was a stable stance. The 10 stampeding wendigoes ran into that stance and there was a loud ringing sound. While Razak flinched, he wasn't pushed back by the charge. His stance had taken the impact.

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

After Razak fended off their assault, he then swung his shield. There was a clanging sound and 5 of the wendigos were thrown. Thanks to the affection stat Ark poured on Razak, his Shield Stroke had risen to Advanced level.

-The level of your pet Razak's Shield Stroke has increased.

Shield Stroke (Intermediate, Passive): your ability to handle the shield has become more precise and you can now push the enemy more effectively. You can also use Shield Stroke to strike five enemies at the same time. If all five attacks succeed then the distance pushed back will increase.

<The defense of the shield increases by 30%. Damage to enemy when struck with the shield +45%, probability of stiffness increased by 20% and Advanced Shield Stroke can be used 5 times in a row>

'It is good that I raised Razak's skill.'

In fact, Ark had worried for a while about whether to use his Affection stat on Racard's Taunt or Razak's Shield Stroke. He had 134 Affection but unlike rising from beginner to intermediate, it cost 100 Affection to raise a skill to advanced. After contemplating for a while, Ark ended up choosing Razak's Shield Stroke skill. While the number of monsters lured would increase with the skill level. Racard's body was insufficient to deal with the numbers that would be attracted. So Ark judged that it would be better to increase Razak's skill and have him back Ark up.

....It was an excellent choice.

Razak hitting 5 of them with his shield meant that 5 monsters would be tied up. With both Racard and Razak, Ark only had to deal with 5~6 opponents.

"Okay. Well done Razak!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak's spirit increased from Ark's praise and he swung his shield even more energetically. Meanwhile Ark extended a hand and shouted.

"Soul Extortion!"

A huge, transparent hand was released from his fingertips. The shape of the hand was slightly different from before. The nails sharpened and grew like the hand of a devil. It wasn't only the appearance that changed. The speed which it flew at the target was faster and it also grabbed a larger piece of soul. The hand of a devil grabbed the wendigo and tore off a piece of its shoulder. The wendigo lost 20% of its health from the attack.

'As expected, increasing it is good!'

Ark laughed at the tattered sight of the wendigo. Ark's preparation wasn't just increasing the skill of his summons. The degree of proficiency in which Soul Extortion rose was actually pretty slow. Despite using it hundreds of times since coming to Hwaryong Mountain, it only increased to 30. Well, he hadn't thought it was useful at the time so he hadn't really been interested.

'If the level of Soul Extortion increases then wouldn't the Spiritual Power absorption be more efficient?'

It was a perfect chance for some investment. So Ark invested the 80 skill points he had saved into Soul Extortion.

-Soul Extortion (Intermediate, Active 117/300): The rating increase means Soul Extortion can target more powerful and evil cursed souls. The physical damage to the target won't increase but the amount of Soul gathered will increase. In addition, the souls drawn will be more easily absorbed and will increase your Spiritual Power more quickly.

<Intermediate Bonus: When using Soul Extortion, there is a 2% chance of causing a low level curse for 10 seconds>

* Soul Extortion will succeed when it deals 70% of the damage. The

user's soul will receive terrible damage if they die and the resurrection time will be increased to a maximum of 96 hours.

It was worth investing points in the skill. Before this he had to catch 5~7 wendigoes before his Spiritual Power increased by 1. Now that it increased to intermediate, he only had to catch 4~6. The absorption rate had become better.

'There is only a difference of one but that difference will have a huge impact when hunting dozens of monsters!'

Now there was also a chance of inflicting a curse on the wendigoes. The curse was one which decreased stats. Even a low level curse would decrease stats by 10%.

'It is a surprisingly worthwhile skill to grow!'

"Soul Extortion! Soul Extortion!"

Ark looked around with an excited expression as the soul of the wendigoes was eaten. The wendigoes instinctively felt fear and hurried away but with Lock on, Soul Extortion had a 70% chance of hitting! Besides, the area was only 50 metres in diameter. Since the range of Ark's Soul Extortion was 30~40 metres, it was a great space for him. The transparent hand grabbed the neck of a wendigo and tore a piece of its soul.

Kiiiiik, kiiiiik!

After he grabbed it a few times, the wendigo became the size of an eyeball. When seeing such a shape, it was slightly pitiful. But Ark had no pity in these circumstances.

"Don't pretend to be cute! Soul Extortion!"

Ark transferred the hand to the wendigo and picked it up. After the small eyeball was taken care of, he looked for other prey. The remaining four were flocking towards him. Four against 1 was slightly burdensome on Ark. But Ark had already taken counter measures for the problem.

“Not a chance. Dark Dance!”

Ark’s feet moved quickly and he disappeared like a ghost.

-Dark Dance’s percentage of completion: 60%!

As soon as he used Dark Dance, his degree of completion reached 60%. Fortunately his evasion rate rose sharply but Ark shook his head.

‘No, it’s not enough. I’m in trouble even if the degree of completion increases even more!’

Dark Scale was triggered when his percentage of completion on Dark Dance surpassed 70%. And Dark Scale decreased his evasion while increasing his defense by 30%. It was good up to that point. The problem with Dark Scale was it had a low probability of reflecting attacks. That was unacceptable if Ark wanted to eat 100% of the wendigo’s soul. So Ark deliberately made mistakes and maintained his completion rate at 65%. He was about to start eating as much as possible when Ark had a horrible thought.

“I can’t waste even 1 point of Spiritual Power on Razak’s Shield Stroke!”

Already the wendigoes weren’t monsters in Ark’s mind anymore. They were just energy to increase Ark’s Spiritual Power.

“Huhuhu, your actions are futile! I have to eat your souls before your health decreases more! Soul Extortion, Soul Extortion!”

Ark went around like a ghost without resting and swallowed the souls of the wendigoes. And the fist continued chasing after them when the wendigoes ran away. He didn’t care which monster it targeted. Ark took care of the surrounding wendigoes after 5 minutes but he had lost 30% of his health. In the meantime, Razak also received 60% damage from fending off the wendigoes. But that wasn’t a problem at all. In fact, the most dangerous part of dealing with the wendigoes was up to now. Racard and his alter egos had lured most of the wendigoes. But now it was simple to handle them.

“Racard, take care of all of them!”

“I understand. Alter ego no. 1, attack everything!”

This was a command of Moonlight Illusion to fight with the enemy. When Racard gave the commands, the alter egos immediately chased after the wendigos. However, they disappeared with one hit from the wendigo’s tongue.

“Ohh, it is my alter ego but why do I feel slightly ill for some reason?”

Racard rubbed his cheek and murmured. When the alter ego disappeared, Ark and Razak looked at the wendigos with sparkling eyes. Yes, when an alter ego disappeared then Ark would take care of the 5 wendigos that it lured.

“Once again. Be prepared Razak!”

Clack clack clack clack! Clack clack clack clack!

It was obviously much easier to care for 5 opponents than 10. Razak easily blocked their charge and Ark started to eat again. After eating those 5, he made another alter ego disappear and took care of the next 5..... So Ark managed to wipe out the pitiful wendigos after 30 minutes.

“Huhuhu, it’s pretty salty?”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured. His experience had hardly changed after taking care of 30 wendigos. And his Spiritual Power had only increased by 4 after 30 minutes. It had been around one week since he first learnt the skill and came to Hwaryong Mountain. During that time Soul Extortion only increased it by 7. It really was a reckless growth rate. However, there was no compensation in return.

“Master, I’ve already used all the Moonlight Illusion.....”

Racard approached Ark and murmured with a voice full of hunger. Ark’s satisfied face instantly turned pale. All the skills obtained

by Blood-sucking had been used. In other words, he needed to suck blood to obtain new skills. Yes, that was the only fear Ark had about hunting for Spiritual Power. Racard's use of Moonlight Illusion was essential for hunting the wendigos. And Racard had to suck blood from Ark in order to obtain the Moonlight Illusion. The problem was that the skill absorbed was random. He didn't know what skill would be absorbed. Previously Racard had to suck his blood thirteen times before his slots were filled. It would have to be repeated many times if he wanted to hunt the wendigos. Thanks to that, it was like Ark had been caught by Karakul again. Ark frowned as he looked at the approaching Racard.

What do you mean? No skills? Didn't you fill two slots?"

"Eh? Didn't you know? One of the alter egos died when Master was fighting against them. So I quickly renewed the skill for Master. Didn't I do well?"

'This guy.....'

Ark had wanted to diligently save Moonlight Illusion. However, Racard had tasted his Master's blood and ended up using the Moonlight Illusion in both slots during the battle. Now he was free to request blood. Ark could clearly see through Racard. Perhaps he even let his alter ego die on purpose. However, he had no evidence to prove it.

"You.....aren't you afraid for your future?"

"What do you mean? I used it because it looked dangerous. I am a loyal summon."

Racard retorted with shining eyes. On the other hand, Ark's eyes were filled with bitterness and a desire for revenge.

"Dammit, I understand. Let me just quickly do this."

Ark sighed and made a meal. He needed to resupply his herbal decoction which would prevent him from getting anaemia. After eating

the herbal medicine, Ark stretched his neck for Racard who muttered with dissatisfaction.

“Eew, you have a herbal medicine smell after eating those pills that is making me uncomfortable.....”

“.....Do you want to die?”

“U-understood! Okay. I’ll just start eating. I’ll eat well. Aang!”

Suck, suck, suck, suck!

Ark sighed as he started to feel dizzy. This time it took twenty times before Moonlight Illusion was absorbed. Radun and Razak looked at him with regretful eyes as Ark turned pale. But Ark clenched his teeth tightly and raised his body.

“Uhh, there’s no time to be resting. Spiritual Power. I have to quickly fill my Spiritual Power!”

“Hihi, okay. Let’s hunt quickly Master. I want to hunt!”

Racard wiped his mouth and smirked.

Ark had goose bumps. It was the first time he was frightened of his summon.

Act 3: Rehabilitation Treatment

“Phew, yesterday was really dreadful.”

His eyes were half-closed and his hair was like a magpie’s nest. Hyun-woo finally crawled out into the living room looking like a shabby person after the sun had already risen for ages. He was always in such a state thanks to the chaos space in New World. It was a life where he played the game for 20 hours before sleeping for a little bit! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say it was a hellish relay. The physical and

psychological damage wasn't small. It had reached the point where he felt sick after seeing the colour red because it reminded him of lava!

"..... But it's still not there yet."

This was what made Hyun-woo different from other users. Most users thought of it as an online game while Hyun-woo thought of it as a different dimension. A few hours? A few days? That was a level where it was just enjoyment. In the first place, Hyun-woo had no concept of time. Once he started an area, he would stay until he judged that there was nothing left for him. It was squeezing out everything he could from his labour. And he was able to.

"Why so far.....?"

Some people wondered this. But it was to get ahead of others. He considered New World his job so he needed to get ahead of other people. He had to be stronger and receive a lot more than other people.

"Yes, I don't have time to be doing this. I have to quickly exercise and enter the game."

Then he heard the sound of his front door opening. When he turned around, Gwon Hwa-rang was entering while pushing his mother's wheelchair.

"Oh, you came to visit?"

"Did you just wake up?"

"Before I noticed it was already 5 o'clock in the morning."

"Act moderately.....I will not say that."

Gwon Hwa-rang grinned and muttered. Recently Gwon Hwa-rang had been visiting once every two days, and he alternated with Hyun-woo to help take his mother to the hospital for treatment. When Gwon Hwa-rang first visited, Hyun-woo had accompanied them daily. But when Gwon Hwa-rang's eyes seemed to indicate 'Hey, are you trying to

interfere?’ then Hyun-woo only accompanied his mother every second day. She didn’t say it but his mother’s expression indicated that she liked it too. But it was slightly strange today. His mother was silent and Gwon Hwa-rang was looking perplexed at his mother.

“What have you been doing?”

“That..... Let’s have a cup of coffee first since you seem tired.”

At Gwon Hwa-rang’s suggestion, the three of them sat down in the living room. Hyun-woo was reminded of something while sipping coffee and suddenly asked.

“Ah, did you find what I was looking for?”

“What you was looking for?”

“I asked Gwon Hwa-rang for something.

“Then you must be referring to New World.”

His mother smiled wryly and lowered her mug. When thinking back, he should’ve noticed it at the time. However, Hyun-woo didn’t notice his mother’s subtle expression change and continued looking at Gwon Hwa-rang. Again he didn’t know why but Gwon Hwa-rang hesitated for a long time before replying.

“Are you talking about the evidence from before?”

He was referring to evidence that there was a relation between the Hermes alliance and the lawless port.

‘There is no doubt that the Hermes alliance is associated with the lawless port. And there’s bound to be some traces left in New World. An agreement between Hermes and the Nakujuk or some proof that they were receiving the pirates’ goods.....’

If there was even one of those things then he would be able to prove a relation between the Hermes alliance and the lawless port. Previously Hyun-woo had found a link between Alan and the secret religious

society of Ankh, causing them to be ruined. The reason that was possible was because laws also existed in New World. In New World, 'everything was possible.' It was a game which offered infinite degrees of freedom. In the game there was the ability to become a general or help NPCs in a coup against the King. Of course it was also possible to harm soldiers.....But just because anything was possible didn't mean that it was recommended. Laws to defend the balance of New World also existed and those that broke the laws would be penalized. And the penalty was proportional to the size of the crime. That was why Alan had been ruined and lost his followers.

'If I find some evidence of a coalition between Hermes and the lawless port then their fates will be similar to Alan's. If they are branded as a criminal group then they will also lose their rights to the Lordship of Silvana.'

So Hyun-woo had asked Gwon Hwa-rang to find evidence while sweeping through the lawless port. However, Gwon Hwa-rang just shook his head.

"I couldn't find it. Those fellows thoroughly hid it."

"Hmm. As expected, it couldn't be settled that easily. Was there anything different?"

"Different?"

"The amount invested into the lawless port by the Hermes alliance should be significant. They would dispose of the pirate's stolen goods and then take the profit. If the lawless port collapsed then they should've lost their investment fund. That kind of damage would not be enough to make them resign."

"I also think so as well....."

"Hmm, we won but I am still slightly uncomfortable."

“There’s no need to worry. The strategy to clean up the lawless port is a success and we can turn it into a military base for Seutandal. Those guys won’t be able to use the same scheme again.”

“Military base?”

Hyun-woo asked with curiosity. The change in Seutandal was important for Hyun-woo. Seutandal was one of the places in Hyun-woo’s triangular trade scheme so he needed to build a trading post there. But he had been so busy hunting the wendigoes that he hadn’t had a chance to ask what was happening in Seutandal.

“Ah, you still don’t know yet. Although it was originally the lawless port, when I looked around the terrain conditions were very good. The cave can easily store 50 battle ships we can use the buildings that the Hermes alliance has already built. So it will be converted to the headquarters of Seutandal’s navy.”

“Navy Headquarters?”

“Seutandal is an island so it requires a navy to protect it. Even with the lawless port gone, we will still need to deal with the pirates from the continent. If we increase the navy then the current harbour won’t be able to hold it. Separating the headquarters from the harbour will make it easier to manage.”

As expected, Gwon Hwa-rang’s tactics were completely different from Hyun-woo’s ideas.

“The lawless port is a natural fortress. Well, the Hermes alliance is familiar with the surrounding terrain but if we take precautions then it won’t be an easy place to attack. At least it is a hundred times better than Seutandal’s current harbour. Budget is also no problem thanks to the profit we got from sweeping up the lawless port.”

At first Gwon Hwa-rang hesitated a bit but then he started babbling on. Then his mother who had been quietly listening moved her wheelchair.

".....I'm tired after going to the hospital. I'm going to rest for a short while."

Gwon Hwa-rang flinched and jumped like a frog.

"I-I.....!"

"No. Just continue. I don't understand entirely but the criminals sound important to Hyun-woo. I'll be fine by myself."

His mother moved her wheelchair and went to her bedroom.

'Eh? What's this? Didn't Mother just say something that seemed really stinging?'

Hyun-woo turned his head to peek and winced.

"Ow, ow, ow, w-what have I done.....?"

Gwon Hwa-rang squeezed his head while muttering helplessly.

"W-what happened?"

"It's just.... In fact....."

Gwon Hwa-rang trembled and explained the circumstances. Something had happened when Gwon Hwa-rang took his mother to the hospital. He was talking happily with Hyun-woo's mother when he received a telephone call. Like Gwon Hwa-rang said, Seutandal was currently in the midst of turning the lawless port into the Navy Headquarters. Gwon Hwa-rang was an expert in tacts so of course he was in charge. If there was even a small problem then the rehabilitation members would call him.

"What? The fort installations are insufficient? Did you consult Isabel? Then return to the entrance for the necessary materials since completion of the fort is the most important thing."

After it disconnected, the phone rang again. While at the hospital, he received over 6 telephone calls. It interrupted Gwon Hwa-rang's conversation with Hyun-woo's mother. But his mistake was after that.

"Isabel? Navy Headquarters? What's going on?"

"Ah, So-mi ssi doesn't need to know about it."

Gwon Hwa-rang unconsciously said. He belatedly noticed what he said but it was too late to take it back.

"No, I mean..... It's really complicated..... That is....."

"That's okay. Please drive."

Hyun-woo's mother replied normally. But his mother was a person as well. Gwon Hwa-rang's insensitive words definitely hurt her. So he kept his mouth shut while heading back to the house. That's why Gwon Hwa-rang's expression wasn't good when entering the house. It was also why he hesitated when Hyun-woo asked about New World.

"Wahhh, what did I do.....?"

Gwon Hwa-rang whined like a puppy while looking at the firmly closed door.

"Ohhhhh. I just..... Information about the Navy Headquarters is so complex that I thought it would be inconvenient for So-mi ssi..... Really. Then..... Ah, no, it's my fault. How stupid must I be to talk about the Navy Headquarters as soon as I enter the house..... Of course she would be angry."

'She's angry?'

Hyun-woo scratched his head. Honestly, Hyun-woo's mother wasn't really angry. Gwon Hwa-rang didn't know how his mother would really behave if she was angry. But Gwon Hwa-rang insensitively mentioned those things so of course she would get prickly. She had deliberately acted angry in order to point out Gwon Hwa-rang's mistake. In fact,

Hyun-woo had often received 'education' like that when he was younger.

'At any rate, my mother really seems mischievous after seeing this. Is she already starting her husband education?'

However, Gwon Hwa-rang didn't know this and he was completely panicked. Hyun-woo felt like giggling after seeing his panicked features.

'But should I leave it like this? Hwa-rang ajusshi has been neglecting Mother lately for New World. Since it is also therapy for him.....'

Hyun-woo was thinking about the circumstances when he realized something.

'Wait? Which reminds me, these days I also.....'

Hyun-woo was living with his mother 24 hours a day. However, it felt like he talked to his mother more when she was at the hospital. They were always in the house together so he didn't think about starting conversations. So it was quite negligent. In addition, recently his conversations with Gwon Hwa-rang after the rehabilitation was always about New World. His mother didn't play New World and she felt a sense of isolation. While his mother wasn't seriously angry, her dissatisfaction had built up over time.

'I've been so insensitive.'

"Uh, what should I do? Hyun-woo?"

"Even if you ask me....."

"Isn't there something you can do? You were the one who brought up Seutandal....."

"I didn't know about what had happened previously. If I knew then I wouldn't have mentioned it. You're the adult who couldn't grasp the atmosphere and continued talking away."

"T-that....."

Gwon Hwa-rang sighed and his shoulders slumped.

“.....I'll repent.”

“.....I'll also repent.”

Hyun-woo realized that he also had to reflect on his actions. He never knew that he had been lacking in the time spent with his mother before this. But New World was like work for Hyun-woo. The cost of living, his mother's medical expenses, loan payments, etc....the money that went into it was 5 million a month. And Hyun-woo earned all that money through New World. The money was earned for his family. But while trying to earn money, he had neglected to spend time with his family. It was a dilemma that everybody in the world experienced, not just Hyun-woo. Anyway, it was true that Gwon Hwa-rang and Hyun-woo had offended his mother by talking about New World. The two men drank coffee and reflected quietly. How much time had passed? Suddenly Gwon Hwa-rang raised his head and shouted.

“That's it!”

“What? What are you saying out of nowhere?”

“The solution is surprisingly simple. So-mi ssi should also play New World!”

“Eek?”

Hyun-woo asked in an astounded voice.

“Really? Isn't she still sick?”

“That's right! Hah, why didn't I think of that before?”

Gwon Hwa-rang described with a heated look.

“Think about it. What was the reason you made me play New World in the first place?”

“For rehabilitation.....”

Hyun-woo answered without thinking before it felt like he had been hit in the back of the head. Then Gwon Hwa-rang's eyes lit up and he nodded.

"Have you finally realized? That's right. Didn't the doctor also say it? So-mi ssi has physically recovered 90% and the remaining obstacle is mental. So these days she has been spending more time in psychiatry treatment. Just like the old me."

Gwon Hwa-rang's words were right. Now his mother was almost completely physically recovered. Although there were several issues with muscle recovery remaining, the biggest problem was that her body was stiffened from lying down for so many years. The best way to treat that was to move her body. No, to be more accurate it was to get her brain familiar with the sensation of moving like a normal person. However, his mother still hadn't recovered her muscle and physical strength so she was limited to rehabilitation.

'But if its New World.....'

It gave orders to the brain to move but it didn't drain the actual physical strength! There was no danger of injuring something while training! And the best thing.....

"If So-mi ssi enters New World then I can be with her 24 hours a day!"

.....That was it. Gwon Hwa-rang's ambition wasn't completely selfless. These days Hyun-woo, Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members spent most of their time in New World. In other words, it was possible to spend more time with her if his mother came to New World. And the issue of her being unable to understand the conversation would disappear. Why hadn't he thought of making his mother play New World?

"Ohhhhh! Dating in the game! Okay, I have to start quickly. Buying the unit immediately.....!"

Gwon Hwa-rang snorted like an excited wild boar and stood up.

"Wait a minute!"

"Eh? Why?"

"It's good but we have to check one thing."

It was his mother's health problems. They couldn't just decide with their feelings. The virtual reality game had a huge effect on Gwon Hwa-rang but his mother's situation was different. After the traffic accident several years ago, she had undergone brain surgery. New World directly connected with the brain so who knew how it could affect her? Hyun-woo made Gwon Hwa-rang calm down and called the hospital. But unlike his worries, the doctor gave permission.

"Virtual reality game? Ah, yes I know about it. In fact I firmly recommend it. I can't guarantee the therapeutic effect in So-mi's case but I've never heard of any side effects. Some doctors do look at it a bit negatively. But in my opinion, it has a significant stress relieving effect."

Hyun-woo then connected to the internet and searched for hundreds of similar cases. Fortunately there was nothing about side effects.

'.....Instead it is quite helpful?'

Now Hyun-woo could start the plan without any worries. Of course, he realized the price wasn't small once he made up his mind. But if it was even a little useful for his mother's treatment than the price of the unit wasn't a problem. In addition, he didn't want Gwon Hwa-rang's help for this matter.

'I want to help my mother with my own strength. And now I can do it.'

Gwon Hwa-rang was willing to help him but Hyun-woo had been working non-stop to earn money. When he scraped together the money had saved in the meantime and the gold from Ark's Comprehensive Store, he had enough funds to buy the game unit.

'I've earned quite a bit of money in the meantime. I can easily buy the unit.....'

He had enough money in his passbook after half a day. If his mother needed something then he would do whatever it took to get it for her.

“Now it’s time to speak to So-mi ssi and go buy the unit!”

“No, that won’t work.”

“Eh? Why?”

“The biggest problem is still left.”

“The biggest problem?”

“Mother.”

Hyun-woo answered with a serious expression. Yes, the biggest stumbling block in this plan wasn’t money but his mother. Hyun-woo knew his mother’s character better than anyone. After Hyun-woo had been born, she never bought a set of new clothes. She was a person who would wear the same clothes for 10 years while repairing them. Even if the game had a therapeutic effect, the unit cost millions of won so it was impossible she would agree. If Hyun-woo pressed it on her using force then she would just secretly get a refund.

“T-then what do we do? Even if we recommend it, won’t it be pointless if So-mi ssi doesn’t agree?”

“You don’t have to worry about that.”

Hyun-woo smiled slyly and replied.

“Leave it to me ajusshi. I’ll handle this matter.”

“Hyun-woo, what’s all this?”

His mother asked with a puzzled expression. The reason for her confusion was the huge box occupying the living room. With the

trademark of Global Exos clearly labelled on the box, it was the unit for New World.

“Ah, you’ve arrived. This is a unit for New World.”

“Then why is it being delivered to our house?”

“Eh? “Oh, didn’t I tell you?”

Hyun-woo trembled and attempted to talk. While the unit installation person tore the box, his mother shook his head.

“Wait a minute, why is the box being cut open.....?”

“It’s okay. Because these is an item from a Global Exos event.”

“Event item?”

The installation person interrupted at his mother’s response and explained.

“Yes, not long ago Global Exos held a commemoration event for its 2nd anniversary among users. Ark-nim applied at that time and won 1st place. The unit is the prize for 1st place. Congratulations.”

“But our house already has a unit.....”

His mother muttered with an awkward expression.

“Well, I was also slightly burdened when I heard that I won the prize from the event. But after thinking I realized I didn’t need to worry. Because Mother should use this.”

“M-me?”

His mother shook her head at his words.

“Me playing the game? I don’t know anything about it so how can I play the game?”

"It does not matter. Since this is an event prize, you can just comfortably lie down and relax in New World. Your doctor also said that it wouldn't be a problem and that it might even be helpful in treating you. That's great. It's a free unit and it can even help treat you."

"But even with the unit, won't you still have to pay money for the game every month?"

"Well, a little bit."

"Then it's okay. Couldn't we receive money from this?"

His mother's reaction was like Hyun-woo predicted. But Hyun-woo had already thought of a way around this. Hyun-woo stealthily winked at the installation technician who nodded.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you in advance. When he applied, Hyun-woo nim agreed to the terms and conditions which stated that this prize is unable to be sold or given to someone outside the family. You also can't return it."

"Huh? You're not giving it to us?"

"It is a conditional lease. The purpose of this event is to bring in new customers. If you use the unit for more than 800 hours in 1 year than we will give you the rights to the unit. Think of it as similar to a cell phone contract."

The installation person smiled and added.

"As you know, the unit for New World is a fairly expensive product. In my position, I would recommend you use the unit for 1 year and then receive it."

"That's right."

Hyun-woo laughed and nodded.

"Like he said, one machine costs millions of won. If we sell it then you can get 2,3 million won. If you use the unit for 1 year then we can get an

unit costing millions of won for free and Mother can also receive treatment.”

“Yes, but.....”

His mother was unable to say anything. The situation made too much sense. To receive a unit worth millions of won out of nowhere and to have the condition that it should be used for 800 hours in one year was strange. It was all leading to her playing the game. She didn’t know everything but she couldn’t argue. Then the installation person handed her a business card and said.

“The contract has gone through the formal procedures. If you have any questions about the contract then please call. If you directly call this number then you won’t have to go through the reception desk. Just ask for Ho Myung-hwan.”

The installation technician raised his hat and laughed. The person who showed his shiny teeth was Ho Myung-hwan who worked at Global Exos. Yes, it was unnecessary to say but this was all Ark’s plan. A unit worth millions of won! In order, he also had to pay thousands of won to play the unit every month. When the game cost 100,000 won every month, there was a 100% guarantee that she wouldn’t accept the unit. So Hyun-woo made up the contract and created a situation where his mother couldn’t possibly refuse. He called Ho Myung-hwan for two reasons. The first reason was that a staff member of Global Exos could purchase the unit for a slightly cheaper price. While he was willing to spend millions of won on his mother, wouldn’t it be good if he could purchase it for a little cheaper? Since Ho Myung-hwan was a fan of Hyun-woo, he bought the unit for 30% cheaper. The second reason in using a Global Exos staff was to stop the return of the unit. Hyun-woo knew there was a high chance that his mother would call the company later to return the expensive product. But there was no event. Then the unit would clearly be 100% refunded. He requested Ho Myung-hwan’s help to prevent such a situation from happening. He had met Ho Myung-hwan a few times so they had already become quite familiar with each other. Since the contents wasn’t anything bad, he willingly

joined in the play. Therefore, the unit occupied a corner of the living room with pride.

"I'm looking forward to the video."

Ho Myung-hwan said to him in a low voice after finishing the installation.

"Ohh, it came! It came!"

Gwon Hwa-rang ran in with a satisfied smile and grabbed his Hyun-woo's mother's hand.

"Now So-mi ssi can also play New World. That's good. It might seem a little strange at first but I think you will do well. No, I'm sure of it. I'll guide you through everything. Well, there are some monsters but you don't need to hunt them. Just walking around will be good for your body. I'm sure of it."

"But I....."

"Hah, Mother, didn't the installation person say it a while ago. If you use this unit for 800 hours in one year then it will be ours. And I already have a unit registered. If Mother doesn't use it then should I return it? We can do that. I'll call and request to return the item....."

"Ah, stop it!"

Hyun-woo who was holding the telephone stopped at his mother's words. A 100% South Korean mother wouldn't be able to give up the unit worth millions of won.

"Huhuhu. That's right. It is no different from throwing money on the road if we return the unit. If you play the game then you don't have to spend any money. It is also possible to make money in the game. And if you try to play the game then it will come naturally. Just try it once. Come, come."

"Hwa-rang ajusshi is right. Come, come!"

The two men pushed his mother towards the unit. His mother eventually gave up from exhaustion.

“U-understood. I’ll give it a try. It is done. Now leave me to try it!”

“Huh? But it is your first time so I should teach you.....”

His mother blushed and scratched her head at Gwon Hwa-rang’s words.

“Hah.....”

The woman sat on a bench and sighed. Her name was So-mi and she was Ark’s mother who had recently connected to New World. In fact, she had actually been interested in New World before. Everybody around her was always talking about the game so it was impossible not to be interested. And the game was beyond her imagination after she connected to it. The ambient scenery, the sky and the earth was amazing. However, there was something else that surprised her.

“The appearance is no different.....”

It was so realistic that she felt distanced from it. Once connected, a person in a wheelchair could stand without any support! So-mi stared spellbound at her legs and started walking slowly. It had been so long since she could stand using her own strength. Was that all?

Sway, totter.

So-mi couldn’t maintain her balance properly and sat down. Naturally it wasn’t a physical disability. The muscles wasn’t moving the character. It was the idea of walking. So-mi had spent so long in the hospital bed that she had a fear of walking. Therefore her behaviour towards walking had become passive. So it wasn’t necessarily easier to move in the game. Ark had found many cases on the internet of near vegetable people enjoying the virtual reality game. Regardless of what body they had, people could do anything in a virtual reality. That was the reason why he encouraged So-mi’s will.

‘I have to play 800 hours in 1 year!’

If she spent all her time inside the game then she could easily fill 800 hours. However, New World had a monthly subscription fee. Although the subscription fee was several thousand a month, she had no choice. If she had to pay something then she should get the most out of it. Wouldn't it even help with her rehabilitation treatment? In addition, she heard from Ark and JusticeMan that she could also make money. So-mi wanted to pay the amount for the subscription fee with her own hands. After thinking about it, So-mi once again stood up. Despite her anxieties, she was able to walk around the village using her own power after a few days. At first So-mi just cared about the price but she became filled with deep emotion at the experience.

“Ah, really.....I'm really walking.”

Other people took walking for granted but she was just grateful she could do it. But no matter how it looked like reality, it was still a game. However, she was unable to repress her emotions after being able to walk under her own power after several years. Now she started to look around.

“No. It is natural to walk in a game. I can't be satisfied with this degree. What do I do now?”

It was natural since So-mi didn't know anything about New World so she left the village after a while. Ark and JusticeMan had talked about New World every day. Through her second hand knowledge, So-mi knew that levels was one of the most important things in New World. And she knew that she had to raise levels through monsters. But So-mi quickly abandoned levelling up after going outside the village.

Kuaaaaang!

“They're coming. Avoid it!”

“You retreat to the back. Surround that fellow on both sides and beat it to death!”

Outside the village, beginner users were jumping in all directions and fighting wolves. Beating, escape, beat, escape..... After many repetitive actions, the user finally defeated a wolf. So-mi had barely just got used to walking so there was no way she could fight against the wolves like that.

“I can’t catch monsters like that.”

So-mi sighed and returned to the village. After seeing how difficult it was, So-mi sat down on the bench.

‘Hunting is the most important thing here..... How can I hunt in this condition? My body is in bad condition and I can’t play the game directly. As expected, New World isn’t that superficial. How can I make money? I have no chance.’

So-mi was despondent.

“Yet another failure!”

Suddenly a girl sat down next to her with a tearful face and whined. So-mi saw that there was a crumpled piece of cloth in the girl’s hand. So-mi was interested so she asked in a friendly voice.

“Excuse me..... Are you trying to create something with that cloth?”

The girl pouted as she looked at the cloth and answered.

“I was trying to create gloves but it isn’t working.”

The girl showed her the several layers of cloth and some kitchen gloves. The problem was that the gloves were torn in half.

“The gloves are my mum’s prized possessions. I ruined them while baking this morning. Mum said it was okay but..... I wanted to make her the same ones.....”

The girl indicated the cloth that was in pieces and sobbed. The girl’s fingers were wounded by her attempts. Despite the pouting lips and wounded fingers, the girl was cute so So-mi stroked her head.

“Do you want me to make it instead?”

“Huh? Really? You know how to make it?”

“This much is easy.”

The girl seemed to consider it before speaking.

“Excuse me..... Then unni, please make this for my mother.”

“Of course.”

So-mi replied.

-The Mischievous Girl Laura's Request

Laura who lives in the settler's village of Harun played a trick while baking and ruined her mother's important gloves. Laura tried to make her mother the same gloves but she was unable to. Laura would like you to make her some new kitchen gloves. However, you have to keep it a secret that you made the gloves from Laura's mother.

‘What's this?’

So-mi's expression was confused.

“Give it to me. I'll make it immediately.”

She didn't pay the information window any regard and started making the gloves for the girl. In fact, she had been interested in the girl because she saw the cloth. So-mi might not know anything else but she specialized in sewing. It was a distant memory but her hobbies in high school was knitting and cross stitching. It was to the extent that she made Ark's clothes when he was younger. Well, she did it until Ark was embarrassed by his friends in junior high. After being released from the hospital, she had started the hobby again. Thanks to that, her needlework skill was almost at a professional standard. It was easy for her to make the kitchen gloves.

“Now, all done. How is it? Is it similar?”

“Wah. It is just like it!”

The girl skipped around with surprise and indicated that she liked the gloves.

“Thank you very much unni. Like I said a while you, you can’t tell my mum that you made these. Okay? I don’t need this so I’ll give it to you instead.”

“W-wait a minute, I.....”

“Goodbye.”

Laura handed her a needle and thread and ran away.

<The Mischievous Girl Laura’s Request> quest has been completed.

-Fabric: Cotton cloth (10th rank general sewing material) has been acquired.

-Thread and needle (10th rank general material) has been acquired.

So-mi involuntarily received the thread and needles. So-mi picked up the needle and thread with a wry smile.

“Hmm, I don’t know what happened but it worked out. Anyway, I can also do needlework in the game.....”

It was good since she didn’t have to spend the 800 hours hunting. After searching through her bag for the basic equipment of a knife, she made some gloves out of the cloth. After some familiar movements, an information window appeared.

-Common Cloth Gloves (A class production item)

Armour type: Cloth gloves

Defense: — Durability: 5/5

Weight: 1 User restriction: Level 1 and higher

Gloves made of ordinary cotton gloves that can be found anywhere. However, this item was made with experienced workmanship.

‘Oh, it is also possible to make something I can use.’

The fact that she could make something like this in New World was fascinating. So-mi became interested and started making more things using the cloth. Aside from the gloves, she also made a hat and scarf. She used the leftover cloth to make it. But after making it, she thought it looked somewhat lonely.

‘It looks a bit flat..... Ah yes, I have enough thread.’

So-mi excitedly turned over the gloves to the back. She used her experienced sewing skill and created a colourful flower shape in seconds. She also placed the same design on the hat and scarf set. Suddenly she heard someone’s voice in front of her.

“Excuse me unni. Are you selling that?”

“Huh?”

So-mi raised her head and inadvertently flinched. While she was distracted by the sewing, dozens of people had gathered around her. When So-mi made a puzzled expression, the previous girl ran up to her and asked.

“Would you sell this to me? No, please sell it to me!”

“S-sell?”

“Yes, it’s a request. It’s the first time that I’ve seen gloves I liked so much!”

“Eh? You’re selling?”

“T-then sell that to me! The hat, sell me the hat!”

“No, sell me the hat instead! How much is it? 50 silver? 1 gold?”

The girls surrounded her with bright eyes. Once again, items created in New World could be classified as clothing. And creating armour and robes required more advanced sewing skills. In other words, the gloves created by So-mi was just a decoration. Naturally a man would feel the charm of armour but women were more interested in beautiful clothes. So simple decorations were important for women. Honestly, what girl wouldn't like jewellery if she could get it? It was the natural instincts of a woman to like something beautiful. Furthermore, it was possible to layer general clothing on top of armour. In other words, it was possible to wear flashy attire on the battlefield! So clothing was the number one desired item for some female users. Those females couldn't miss the chance to obtain So-mi's unique clothing.

“W-what is happening?”

So-mi looked down at her hands with a foolish expression. After selling the gloves, hat and scarf, the people surrounding her disappeared. And So-mi held 3 gold in her hand. The money was gained in a truly unexpected way.

“I can get money like this?”

Then she visited the general store and bought 30 cotton cloths.

“It is also possible to make money this way!”

So-mi grabbed her bag filled with cloth and became motivated. She didn't know how much 3 gold was in reality. However, this was something for her to do in New World since she couldn't catch wolves. It was something for her to do after spending so long in the hospital. It happened after making dozens of flashy clothing.

-Sewing (Beginner, Passive): You have gained the sewing technique and can produce various types of clothing.

When the level increases, you can handle more sophisticated designs

and high grade cloths. In addition, you can create clothing with the 'charm' option that will increase the probability of creating luxury items. When your sewing skills reached the Advanced stage, you will be able to produce armour and robes with defense. However, you need to acquire the relevant recipe to create the armour.

<When using cloth and leather, you can create clothing and armour between the 7th to 9th ranking>

-Embroidery (Special, Beginner, Passive): Technique to embroider clothing.

This technique is a special skill which requires dexterity. When embroidering clothes, there is a high probability of adding a special option. The type of option added by embroidery depends on the degree of completion. The use of high grade materials and embroidery will improve the option.

However, if it fails then the durability of the clothing can be decreased.

<When embroidery is placed on clothing, you can create 7th to 9th rank items>

When the clothes were completed, the skill proficiency bonus was applied to the clothes. And when she used the embroidery skill, options such as 'courage +1' and 'recovery rate +5%' was added. Although it was a beginner skill and not that many options were applied, it was a starting village so items with those items were quite attractive. No, it was already attractive since embroidered clothes in New World. Thanks to So-mi, a new trend in fashion was created. After a week had passed, So-mi became a well-known costume designer in the starter village of Harun. She was also happy since it was the first time she didn't need anybody's help after leaving the hospital. And she was excited for users to wear her clothes so she poured hard work and sweat into it. Thus So-mi began to increasingly log into New World.

Act 4: Dragonian

“Character information window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +500	
Fame	2,365 (+500)	Level	374
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal’s Hero	
Health	7015 (+425)	Mana	7205(+225)
Spiritual Power	786	Strength	757 (+38)
Agility	957 (+110)	Stamina	1197 (+35)
Wisdom	173 (+10)	Intelligence	1265 (+5)
Luck	167 (+60)	Flexibility	181
Art of Communication	69	Affection	49 (+10)
Resilience	439	Dark Fog	36
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%,			

Penalty based on water is nullified.

Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%

Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10

*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20,
Defense +40

Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3

Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed
+10%, 'Jump' is available

Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When
health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of
the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%,
'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5,
Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20
seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame
+500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration.
Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased
by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

Ark smiled with satisfaction as he checked the information window. It had been one week since he entered the chaos space. He had reduced his sleeping hours to 3~4 hours a day and continued eating the wendigos. The wendigos were level 300~350. Since the level 370 Ark was fighting the wendigos with an average level of 320, he didn't receive a lot of experience. Even when he hunted the wendigos that were level 350, he only received 60% of the experience. After hunting for a week, he fortunately managed to gain 3 levels.

'But.....'

Ark's goal was to raise his Spiritual Power! And the result was a great success. He managed to gain an enormous extra 380 Spiritual Power. After seeing the results of his efforts in the information window, a giggle escaped.

"Huhuhuhu, 786 Spiritual Power..... Did you see? This is it! Now I can use the Ghost Knight Corps and Area Declaration skill! Huhuhuhu, hahaha.....ugh!"

Ark suddenly felt dizzy and stumbled.

Clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Razak who had been watching approached with anxiety. And sighed as he looked at Ark with pitying eyes. Right now Ark wasn't in a position to be energetic. His eye sockets were so hollow they looked like something on a dead person. Cheekbones protruded from his face. His skin was tight and dehydrated. Ark had become a perfect mummy after one week. The reason Ark looked like that.....

“Oh, Master. Don’t force it too much. Well, it was my pleasure.”

Racard folded up the many layers of fat on his stomach and spoke. Racard’s appearance was the complete opposite from Ark’s. His face was greasy and his stomach was so fat that it wobbled as he moved. Yes, it was him. He was the culprit who turned Ark into a mummy. For the past week, Racard had sucked Ark’s blood in order to use Moonlight Illusion. Even though he ate the stamina tonics, it was ineffective in recovering his physical strength. Racard absorbed energy from the blood and the result was the fat stomach. Therefore Ark was skin and bones from the malnutrition and lack of blood while Racard was obese and stuffed full of nutrition from the abuse of his Blood-sucking skill.

“It can’t be helped. Moonlight Illusion is needed to hunt a lot of wendigos. And as planned, I managed to raise my Spiritual Power by 380. But, but.....’

“Now all the wendigos are dried up. How regretful! Right Master?”

He felt his spirit darken as he listened to Racard’s words. However, Racard had now 100% grasped Ark’s personality. Because after sucking the blood so many times, he confirmed that there would be ‘absolutely no retaliation.’ No matter what he did, Ark wouldn’t change his attitude because he needed Racard.

‘Dammit, my summons are getting smarter and more ambitious as time goes by.’

Although Ark initially beat his pets for no reason, now that their heads became smarter he couldn’t beat them for no reason or else there would be backlash. If he wanted to discipline them then he always needed a new reason and that wasn’t easy.

‘Well, now that Racard is like this.....

Ark looked at the pieces of land floating around him. For example, if a monk at a temple developed a taste for meat then wouldn’t he have to leave? After hunting for Spiritual Power through the week, he had

managed to navigate through all the floating lands and killed the wendigoes. Fortunately the wendigoes were now gone like Racard said a short while ago.

“Now there’s only the quest left?”

For the past week Ark hadn’t even been thinking about the quest. If he freed the souls of the Fire Draconians inside Dragonian then the chaos space might reset to its original state. If that happened then the wendigoes which were dragged inside would also disappear. Therefore Ark wanted to maintain the chaos space even if he had to give up the quest. But after one week, he confirmed that the wendigoes didn’t respawn anymore. He had no choice but to complete the quest.

“There are no more wendigoes here. Let’s finish this.”

Ark recuperated using food and headed to his destination. Moving through the floating pieces of land in the chaos space wasn’t a problem for Ark anymore. At the first the land masses seemed to move erratically but after a while he realized that they moved in patterns. Just like planets orbiting the sun, they flowed around a central point. That point was right in the middle of the chaos space!

“There!”

Ark looked at the huge object occupying one of the land masses. It was the huge dome he saw at the top of Hwaryong Mountain. At the heart of the chaos space was a semicircle of stone arches which seemed to resemble a mountainous place. The only difference from the outside dome was that this one was formed out of rocks. The size was approximately 4~5 kilometres in diameter. It was also half submerged in lava.

“This must be Dragonian!”

Ark moved to the land mass and arrived at the stone mountain. It formed a dome but the surface was made out of rock so there was no concern about slipping.

“My guess is that the entrance should be somewhere here.....”

Ark crawled around the rock surface and examined it. Everything in the chaos space rotated around this location so it had to be the right place. If Dragonian was here then it must be inside this huge rocky mountain. Therefore there must be a passage to enter the rocky mountain. But after searching around for 3 hours with Racard, he couldn't find a passage inside the rocky mountain.

‘That’s strange? No matter how much I think, shouldn’t this place be Dragonian?’

Ark scratched his head with confusion.

Ku ku ku ku. Puswiiiiii!

“What, what the?”

Suddenly the mountain started shaking roughly and the ground where Ark was sitting split open. In the ensuing blast, a powerful suction force surrounded Ark’s body and he was sucked in.

“Waaaaah”

Ark screamed as he was sucked into the darkness.

Syuuuuuuck, kung!

-The ability of the Cat Knight has reduced the fall damage by 50%.
-Thanks to your flexibility, the fall damage has been reduced by 40%.

There was a tingling from the impact and the message window appeared. After hitting the ground, Ark hurriedly raised his head and looked around.

“Huk, what, what the? This is?”

The place where Ark fell was a ruin. Debris from the broken fort and buildings were scattered around. But the fort and building wreckage wasn't ordinary. The bricks scattered around were huge and one surviving door was dozens of metres high.

"I've found it. This is the city of Dragonian where the Fire Draconians lived!"

Ark instinctively perceived that he had found the place he was looking for. The Fire Draconians was a species 20 metres high. It was natural for their residence to be huge. The door dozens of metres high was proof that the Fire Draconians lived here.

"You bastard!"

Suddenly a huge roaring sound shook the dome. A huge shape showing its fangs looked down at Ark. The shape was a mix of lizard and human and resembled Valderas and Lumines. But the form of the monster wasn't ordinary. Here and there on the body.....pieces of rotten skin peeled off and revealed the bones. And the gaping wounds were maggot infested.

'What's with this guy?'

"I found you, you evil bastard!"

The monster sucked in a deep breath and blew out. Deep red flames came pouring out from that guy's mouth. Ark freaked out and rolled along the ground to avoid the damage. The monster followed after him.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Deep footprints were imprinted into the ground wherever it stepped. One hit would be a critical attack!

'But it is slow!'

Ark rolled along the ground and through the legs of the monster. That area was the largest blind spot of a big monster. As expected, the

monster panicked and stepped back. Ark quickly stood up and used Dark Dance. With the monster's slow attacks, it couldn't catch Ark who was using Dark Dance. Ark managed to get some distance away from it and stared.

'When looking at those abominable features, that guy is definitely Magura's subordinate. Although I was slightly confused at first, now I'm more comfortable. Its attacks are powerful but it is a slow monster so it won't be a difficult opponent for me. Fortunately I didn't receive a lot of fall damage so I should have no difficulty if a boss appears.'

"Razak, Racard, get ready!"

Ark drew his sword and ordered Razak and Racard to get ready.

"Racard, the opponent is slow. Attack his occipital nerves to disturb that guy! Razak, his attack power is huge. It is impossible for you to block his attacks with your shield head on. Attack its legs from the side to stop its movements!"

"Heh, this fight will be simple. Shall I work off some of this fat? Kuaak!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Racard started flying while his belly fat continued talking while Razak easily ran forward. Ark also grabbed his sword firmly with both hands and moved to his position. The monster in the centre while Ark and Razak flanked its side and Racard was behind. It was their regular triangle formation.

"Now, shall we start?"

Ark took an attacking stance and prepared to begin his attacks.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

Suddenly the ground shook like an earthquake was occurring. Racard's scream could be heard from behind the monster.

"M-Master, over there!"

“What....what the? That is?”

Ark turned around and instinctively stiffened. There was a dust cloud on the hill opposite Ark from 10 monsters running forward. The monsters had huge rotting bodies while holding a spear and mace! No matter how slow they were, he couldn't handle 10 monsters at the same time. But that wasn't the reason why Ark was confused.

‘Aren't they? But.....huk, don't tell me?’

“Eyes of the Cat!”

Ark thought something was abnormal and used Eyes of the Cat on the monsters.

‘T-this.....! No way..... Then these guys are.....?’

“Damn, no!”

Ark frowned and shouted.

“Racard, don't you have one Moonlight Illusion left? Activate it! Lure them to the other side!”

“Ohhhh, Blood-sucking skill activate!”

Racard was engulfed in a flash of light before his alter egos flew towards the monsters.

“Now! Razak, transform back into a sword! Let's go!”

Ark ran away using Sprint without looking back. Fortunately the monsters were chasing Racard's alter egos so they didn't pay attention to Ark. Meanwhile Ark had managed to escape. After confirming his combat status, he collapsed with a sigh of relief.

“Huck huck huck, dammit.....didn't I almost ruin the situation?”

Ark sighed and cursed. The reason he ran away from the 10 monsters was because the information confirmed that they were ‘Cursed Fire

Draconians.’ Yes, the monster that Ark attacked wasn’t Magura’s subordinates. They were Fire Draconians who had been caught by Magura’s subordinates.

“Why are the trapped souls wandering around?”

After listening to Lumines’ words, he had guessed that the trapped souls were being forced to do hard labour somewhere. So he never imagined that they would be wandering around freely like this.

‘But why are the souls of the Fire Draconians attacking me? After talking to Lumines, the Fire Draconians don’t seem to be hostile towards humans. Perhaps the trapped souls are being controlled by the devil? No, that’s not it.’

Ark thought back to the situation just now. Just before attacking Ark, the Fire Draconian said that it had finally ‘found the devil.’ It was impossible for it to say that if the devil was controlling it. That meant.....

‘I need to check this!’

“You guys wait here for a while.”

Ark found a suitable hiding spot for his summons and used Stealth. Then he went inside Dragonian. Dragonian was located inside the stone dome which only had a diameter of 4~5 kilometres. After checking every corner, Ark managed to sneak into a gathering of Fire Draconians. The Fire Draconian souls that attacked him just then were gathered in the centre of the ruins. He approached closely and listened to them talk.

“Was he really the devil?”

“But was the devil that small?”

“Um..... I don’t know. I don’t remember. I just feel this awful gnawing sensation on my soul. And my memory..... Aside from the devil, now I

can't even remember my name..... All I can remember is my vengeful feelings towards the devil."

"It doesn't matter what the devil looks like. We're trapped in a place where only the devil can enter. If there are any existences other than us then that person is the devil."

"Yes. He must be the devil. We have to find him before even our vengeful feelings become blurred.

"But it is dangerous if we scatter to look for him. If he is the devil then we absolutely can't defeat him by ourselves. Let's find him altogether."

The spirits of the Fire Draconians buzzed noisily and rushed out of the area.

'It is like I guessed.'

Now Ark was sure of his reasoning. Dragonian was a large area with its own clouds and valley. However the structure wasn't that complicated. It wasn't a place where someone could spend time hiding. Despite the Fire Draconians sweeping through every corner, they could only find their own presences.

'Clearly the souls of the Fire Draconians have a hostile relationship with the devil. But they said they 'found' it when they saw me. That fact that I was mistaken as the devil meant they haven't discovered his location yet. However, Dragonian was inside a stone dome and it had limited space. Dragonian has been in this situation for hundreds of years. The fact that the Fire Draconians haven't found the devil yet..... Yes, it is indeed like Lumines said.'

Ark now started to realize the meaning of Lumines' words. Lumines had said that Magura hid himself after deceiving the Fire Draconians. The souls of the Fire Draconians were bound to the devil but they couldn't find him. Lumines mentioned that Magura had a large body which meant that the devil looked similar to the souls of the Fire Draconians. Ark hid himself while searching around Dragonian to confirm his theory.

‘Then all the souls of the Fire Draconians are currently searching for the devil?’

Ark looked with amazement at the souls of the Fire Draconians. While it was difficult to separate them, he could see approximately 30 of them. It was impossible to figure out if one of them was the devil just by the appearance.

‘I don’t know if you’ve ever gotten ... the end. ‘

Ark already firmly believed that the devil was among the Fire Draconians. According to the Fire Draconians’ words, no presences other than the devil could enter here. No, the devil was also mixed among them so couldn’t resolve the misunderstanding. If Ark showed himself then they would attack without asking any questions. Just as he was thinking that.

-A part of your ability was absorbed by an unknown presence.

<Abilities that disappeared: Strength -3, Stamina -3, Intelligence -8, Spiritual Power -6>

* Once you find the cause of the absorption, you can take back the removed abilities.

* If you die before taking back the ability then the absorbed ability will disappear forever.

“Huk, what is this?”

Ark freaked out as he checked the information window. The status window said that some of his stats had decreased? Ark then realized that the situation was more serious than he thought.

“Damn! What on earth is going on?”

The devil hiding here had the power to gnaw on souls. That was why the Fire Draconians lost their memories and changed to that horrible appearance. Then it also had the power to take away Ark’s abilities. But

right now Ark was using Stealth. How was he found by the devil.....? Anyway, now wasn't the time to be thinking such things.

"Before it is too late, I have to find the devil and defeat him!"

However, Ark didn't know how he came in here. Then the only way was that the devil pulled him in here.

"If I die then my lost stats will permanently disappear! If the devil controls all those Fire Draconians....."

The devil could just hide while controlling those guys. If he killed the souls of the Fire Draconians then he would definitely fail the quest. However, the quest wasn't the problem anymore. If he lost a bunch of stats then what use was the compensation? But the problem wasn't that simple. Of course, the Fire Draconians already had a lot of their power taken away by the devil so they were weaker. However there were 30 of them. Moreover, one of them was the devil. In other words, he had to fight against the boss monster and 29 Fire Draconians.

'The problem is those guys are going together.' This method he used to take care of the wendigoes needed at least 10 opponents. But it was impossible no matter how he thought about it. Those guys were slow but they stayed together and could use their fire for ranged attacks. If only there was a way to expose the devil from the Fire Draconians.....'

Then something popped into Ark's head.

'Wait? Didn't the Fire Draconians have a weakness?'

Ark raised his head and surveyed the area. After thinking for a while, Ark's eyes started sparkling.

"Maybe..... No, with this there is a much higher possibility of winning against the Fire Draconians. Okay, this is it. There's no choice. I have to try this!"

“Uh? This place.....?”

The souls of the Fire Draconians looked down and frowned.

On the floor pits were open like rats had chewed on it. It wasn't only here. Since he started, Ark had already dug up over 10 places in Dragonian.

“What on earth is that guy thinking?”

“I don't understand, is he hoping that we'll fall into the holes?”

“Surely he isn't that stupid..... He's obviously arranging something.”

“He fooled our eyes for hundreds of years. I don't know when he'll begin hiding again so we have to find him quickly. Hurry!”

“But doesn't it seem to have become slightly colder?”

“Uh? Now that you mention it?”

“Could it be connected to the reason why he is digging the land?”

“I haven't heard that temperatures would go down if the ground is dug up. Let's just go!”

The Fire Draconians began to move on from the place where the earth was dug up. None of them noticed the set of eyes watching from the sky. The eyes belonged to Racard who flapped his wings and followed them. Racard guessed the direction the Fire Draconians were moving in and instantly contacted Ark.

‘Master, those guys are moving in Master's direction from point D!’

“Damn!”

Ark's voice was heard through the wireless communication. Then Ark frowned and shouted towards Razak.

“Those guys are coming. Hurry and move out from the pit!”

Clack clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak who was carrying dirt using his shield hurriedly jumped out of the pit. Ark also collected his shovel and exited the pit. When he came outside, he immediately saw the dust cloud approaching from the other side. They were the Fire Draconians that Racard mentioned.

“Damn. I’ve barely started digging here..... Are they getting faster?”

Ark complained as he ran in the opposite direction. Yes, it was unnecessary to say but Ark was the one going around digging holes in Dragonian. He was digging in order to find a weapon to reveal the devil!

‘If I find it then there is a 100% chance of revealing the devil. Once the devil is revealed, there is no reason to fight against the Fire Draconians. No, the Fire Draconians would probably end up helping me against the devil.’

So Ark assigned Racard to watch the Fire Draconians movements while going around digging the ground. But to be honest, this method was a gamble. There was no guarantee that he would find ‘it’ inside Dragonian or that he would be able to trap the devil in it. And he hadn’t found any trace of ‘it’ yet even after working a couple of days.

“Well, at least I found an unexpected treasure while digging.....”

Ark pulled out a red gem similar to a ruby from his pocket. It was a Hearthstone that Ark discovered when he first started digging. After shovelling at the land for a while, a small stone had appeared.

“Eh? T-this!”

-Fire Stone (Hearthstone)

A hearthstone that has absorbed magic for a long time while under the earth. It isn’t uncommon in New World to find mysterious stones that can absorb the magic around it. The nature of the stone would change depending on where it is buried. A stone buried near the volcano would

absorb a fire attribute while a stone buried near a snowy mountain would absorb an ice attribute. A stone which has taken on such attributes are called Hearthstones.

This Hearthstone has absorbed an aura of fire. If the Fire magic is absorbed incompletely then it will explode when receiving an impact. Players mainly use it as a combustion magic ingredient or it can be used as a bomb. In addition, it will give a mysterious power to items when inserted in a socket.

<Directly used: When thrown, all those within a 5 metre radius will receive 1-100 fire damage>

<Used in socket (Armour exclusive use): Fire Resistance +2>

“Hearthstone!”

Ark shouted with joy as he found an unexpected item. Of course the flame stone itself didn't have great stats. But there was a reason Ark cheered when he found the Hearthstone. In fact, while travelling Ark had been digging at the ground after setting up campsites. After being captured by Karakul and forced to do hard labour, he discovered it was possible to find japtem while using 'Excavation' to dig the land. But Ark's purpose wasn't finding japtem. To be honest, if he wanted japtem then it was easier to find them while hunting. Ark continued digging in order to find a massive treasure! He only used 'Excavation' to find that treasure. The Hearthstone! Yet he hadn't found anything despite his persistent efforts..... Hearthstones were generally excavated in a place which a strong power, in other words a power spot. And this place had been sealed up for hundreds of years! In other words, the power of fire which couldn't be released for hundreds of years had accumulated in the ground.

‘That’s right. Why didn’t I think of that? Hwaryong Mountain has some of the most powerful magic on the condition so of course the conditions to create a Hearthstone would be right. Then.....!’

Ark took out a small stone from his bag. While digging everywhere, he had sometimes found an empty Hearthstone. The reason Ark hadn't thrown them away and carried them around was because he had the chance to turn them into real Hearthstones. Ark inserted the empty Hearthstone in the place where the Fire Stone emerged. Then he pulled out the Phantom Hourglass and used it.

"Maximum acceleration!"

Then the sand at the top started to fall at a tremendous speed. Ark waited until all the sand had fallen to the bottom. The empty Hearthstone was filled with sudden power. If it was incomplete then it would change into the Fire Stone. But instead of becoming a Fire Stone, it became a Hearthstone with a red tint.

"It's a success!"

Ark lifted the Hearthstone and investigated the information window.

-Explosion Stone (Rare Hearthstone)

It is a Hearthstone which has absorbed the heat of Hwaryong Mountain for hundreds of years. Hwaryong Mountain is a sacred place which has contains the energy of fire. This Hearthstone which has absorbed the power of Hwaryong Mountain contains one of the stronger fire energy in the world. A Hearthstone which has absorbed this much power can be found once in hundreds of years. It can be used as a deluxe magic ingredient and went inserted into a socket, the item will display a special quality.

<Used in socket (Weapon exclusive use): When the Hearthstone is added to a weapon, there is a 33% possibility of causing an explosion and dealing additional 50-100 fire damage. There is also a splash damage which will deal 10-50 fire damage to all enemies 5 metres in front of him>

A rare Hearthstone! The rare Hearthstones only appeared once in several hundred years! A 33% chance of causing 50-100 fire damage!

Furthermore, when the effect was exercised then all enemies within 5 metres in front of him would receive 50-100 fire damage. The Explosion Stone had an enormous effect which suited its name. When the rare Hearthstone absorbed the surrounding power, the area instantly felt like it had become colder.

“I found a rare Hearthstone with fire power! All this is worth it just for the rare hearthstone.”

Of course he would insert the Rare Hearthstone into the Promised Sword. And the Fire Stone was a consumable so he could also sell it at the auction and make quite a good amount of money. He once again packed the Hearthstone in his bag with a proud feeling.

‘This definitely feels like a bonanza.’

However, the message which appeared next poured cold water on his happy mood.

-A part of your ability was absorbed by an unknown presence.

<Abilities that Disappeared: Strength -4, Wisdom -7, Luck -5, Health -200>

“Damn, again!”

Ark’s face which had been remembering the happy memory distorted. For the last two days, Ark had his stats absorbed dozens of times a day. During this time, the amount of stats he lost was equivalent to losing 50 levels! Ark’s summons also had their stats disappear.

“I really don’t have time anymore. If I lose any more stats then there is no guarantee I can win against the devil. If I can’t find ‘that’ by the end of the day then I’m screwed!”

The cornered Ark hurriedly rushed to the next place and began shovelling. Thanks to his digging while travelling, his Excavation skill was currently at the Advanced level. The shovel dug at the soil every time he swung it. Razak also used his shield to help dig and even Radun

swallowed the earth before throwing it away somewhere else. After Ark and his summons were digging awhile, a large puddle formed. However, Ark still hadn't recovered 'it.' Ark released the shovel and started thinking.

'Was I mistaken? Is 'that' really here?'

Even if 'it' was 100% here, there was still a problem. Dragonian was a limited space but it was still 4-5 km in diameter. It was impossible to dig and find it with just one shovel. And the more time dragged on, the more the devil would absorb his abilities.

'I made a mistake. From the beginning it was a gamble with a low rate of success.'

He should've fought the Fire Draconians when his stats were absorbed the first time. Even if he had to give up the quest to escape from Dragonian, it was better than dying and losing his stats. But now he had stats equivalent to 50 levels absorbed. If he died then he would lose 50 levels. Would all the effort he put into raising his stats be in vain?

'It is better to give up here than to quit the game!'

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

"Huck huck huck, M-Master!"

Racard flew towards him with his tongue hanging out.

"What? Are the Fire Draconians coming here?"

"No, those guys moved in the opposite direction. Please give me water. It is unbearably hot."

"What did you say? Don't you know what kind of situation this is?"

"Damn, I know. But I already have no strength in my wings. Can't you give me a little bit of water? Ey, I don't know! I can't do anymore! Kill me or do whatever you want!"

Racard fell to the ground and acted like a child having a temper tantrum.

“This guy is acting like this when his Master might have to give up the game.....”

However he couldn't blame Racard. Even if the Hearthstone had absorbed some of the fire aura, there was still a lava area. While Ark had been tirelessly shovelling for the last two days without any work, Razak and Radun were also exhausted. Racard had been flying around the whole time while monitoring the Fire Draconians. Since he was fat from Ark's blood, Racard in particular had double the energy consumed.

“It can't be helped.”

Ark sighed and took out his sword. Of course even one drop of water couldn't be found in Dragonian. At first he had worried about hunger and thirst but Ark soon found a way to get water. He used his Elemental Sword to give his sword a magic attribute! He used the ice attribute on his sword which would heat up and melt. However, it wasn't that easy to obtain water using that method. The magic attribute was heavily influenced by the surrounding environment. At a river it was possible to make enough ice to eat Patbingsu (shaved ice). But the atmosphere of Dragonian made it difficult to create ice. Ark placed his sword about the pot and received a drop of water which fell. Aside from his pets, he was also suffering from thirst. When he saw a drop of water, a sigh naturally flowed out.

“Hah, this really is pitiful. There must not be water around..... No, if there was water in the area then I wouldn't need to use Elemental Sword to create water.”

Ark murmured with a pitiful expression until he suddenly received a jolt to his brain.

“Eh? What, what the? What have I been doing?”

Ark stood up and looked around a stupid face. There were already a few pits within a 10 metre area.

'Oh my god. Doing this kind of thing..... Did I become really stupid? Why did I waste two days when there is such an easy method? Was there a reason to go around digging at the land like crazy?'

Ark hurriedly put away his sword and shovel.

"Racard, Razak there's no time so follow me!"

"What? W-water?"

"Shut up. There's no time for that!"

Act 5: Devil's Identity

"I've found it!"

The gazes of the Fire Draconians concentrated on a hill as they heard someone's voice. Then one man appeared on top of the hill and hurled curses at them.

"Damn. Yes, it's me. What are you going to do? You stupid lizards! No matter how much your spirit has been eaten, how can you confuse me for the devil that trapped you? Huh? I'm a human! That guy called Lumines was whining so I came in to look for you!"

"Nonsense!"

"The fact that you entered here is evidence that you are the devil!"

"Kill him, get revenge for the Fire Draconians!"

The Fire Draconians immediately took out their weapons and climbed up the hill. When the herd of Fire Draconians came within 20 metres of him, the ground shook like there was an earthquake. Ark instantly turned his body around and ran off.

‘These guys use blunt weapons. While Resilience will allow me to withstand it a bit, if I am surrounded by those guys then I would be stunned and it will be game over! I have to keep the maximum distance while luring them!’

But just maintaining the distance was difficult. If he got too far away from them then the combat state would be released. Ark’s purpose wasn’t to lure 1 Fire Draconian to his destination. If even 1 Fire Draconian fell behind then it would cause a problem. For Ark’s plan to 100% succeed, all of them had to chase after him.

“Racard, if any of them fall behind or watches from a distance then use Taunt on them!”

“Okay!”

Racard flew to the side at Ark’s command. Then he cursed at any Fire Draconians that slowed down. The Fire Draconians became furious and caught up. However it wasn’t easy to lure 30 opponents. Ark controlled his speed and the Fire Draconians chased after him as one group. After about 10 minutes. The destination Ark was luring the Fire Draconians to was just beyond the hill.

“Racard, are there any Fire Draconians remaining?”

“Okay, I’ll check!”

“One, two.....all 30.....I’m certain.”

After finishing the personnel check, he lured them within a short distance and turned around. At the same time, the place covered with a hazy vapour appeared.

“That’s it, we’ve arrived! Ya, these stupid lizards! Try attacking me!”

Ark ran into the fog and shouted. Then he turned around and stared at the Fire Draconians chasing him. One of the Fire Draconians rushed towards him wielding an iron bar.

"Die, you demonic fellow!"

Ark quickly rolled to avoid the iron bar and pointed towards him.

"You've finally shown your true identity you devil!"

"W-what? Devil? Are you talking about me? The devil....."

"You."

Ark's confident answer caused the Fire Draconian to flinch and stop moving. Ark stood slowly and said with a decisive voice.

"Yes, the devil. The one who trapped the souls in Dragonian and slowly chewed on the souls of the Fire Draconians like a parasite is you!"

"You're talking nonsense....."

"Nonsense? Heh, why don't you look around before saying that?"

".....?"

The Fire Draconian looked around with a perplexed face. Until then the Fire Draconians had been chasing Ark. But now the remaining 29 Fire Draconians weren't in front of Ark. They were on the outskirts of the water vapour and looking around absent-mindedly.

"What, what is this? This guy....."

"It is useless. They're not going to come in."

"What?"

"You still don't understand? What happened to your cheerful expression?"

Ark tapped the ground and a noise like a splash could be heard.

"T-this.....?"

“Yes, it is water. To me more exact, it is the hot springs underneath Dragonian.”

Ark laughed and replied. That’s right. Ark had been digging in order to find the hot springs. The reason Ark thought of the hot spring was because he remembered his fight with Valderas. Hundreds of people fighting at the same time couldn’t defeat Valderas, but Ark managed to fight him along because he used the Fire Draconians weakness to water. Since the Fire Draconians were spirits of fire, just touching water would cause them massive damage. In other words, it was like poison to the Fire Draconians! If there was a place with water than the Fire Draconians would instinctively stop walking. But if it was the devil? If the devil had been hiding among the Fire Draconians for hundreds of years then of course it would be aware of their weakness. But the devil’s excitement meant that it would continue forward.

Therefore Ark looked for the hot springs because he thought it would reveal the devil. There had been many hot springs drifting in the chaos space. And those pieces of land had all fallen off Dragonian. Naturally he thought that a hot spring would be somewhere in Dragonian. The problem was that it would be difficult to find the hot springs in the ground in an area that was 4~5 kilometres.

But the problem was settled surprisingly easily.

‘Elemental sword!’

If there was water nearby then he could add an ice attribute to his sword. Then it was natural for it to be influenced by hot springs buried in the ground. So Ark ran around Dragonian and continuously used Elemental Sword in order to find water. Then he dug at a place which showed the strongest effect and.....bingo! The hot springs he was waiting for appeared.

“The fact that you entered here and didn’t receive any damage from the hot springs is evidence.

Now, how about it? Do you still have something to say?”

“Ugh!”

The Fire Draconian burst out with confusion and stepped backwards. Then it saw the group of Fire Draconians who had been gathered together and stopped. It scratched at its neck for a while before laughing creepily.

“Kukukuku, you saw through my act!”

“Hey!”

The crowd of Fire Draconians burst out with anger. The body of the Fire Draconian who entered the hot springs melted down and a black shape appeared. It was a slippery, black form that almost looked like slime. Maggots? Anyway it was a creepy, black monster with one red eye. Its name was Cell. Unexpectedly, it was only a level 300 monster.

‘Level 300? Is it similar to the wendigoes? Isn’t that strange?’

The look and level of the devil was completely different from what Ark expected. But he soon shook his head and concentrated on Cell.

‘This is a boss monster so I can’t be careless.’

“Kukukuku, this mischief ends here. You cheeky bastard! I’ll melt you slowly and make you wander around this place forever……. Nothing has changed even if you know my true identity. I’ll rip you apart and digest you!”

Cell shrieked and ran up to him. Then sharp projectiles rose from its skin. Ark threw his body out of the way and a wave of water rose into the sky as the projectile impacted with the ground. It was infused with tremendous speed and power. However, Ark was still composed. Ark rolled across the ground and stood up before shouting coldly.

“Hey, Pudding.”

“What? P-pudding?”

"I've already discovered your true identity. All the Fire Draconians also know."

"Do you expect the Fire Draconians to help you? Those guys are scared of water so how can they come in here?"

"Oh, then you're not afraid of water?"

"Kukukuku, scared of water? Does my appearance look scared? You sound like a fool talking."

Cell's whole body shook as he sneered at Ark. Ark's body also shook like Cell's and he scoffed.

"Kukukuku, you don't understand the meaning of the word pudding. If you don't want me to receive the help of the Fire Draconians then why don't you come in deeper? You say that you're not afraid of water? Let's see if you can say that after a while. Racard, now!"

Ark shouted powerfully. There was a sudden bang and something approached at a tremendous speed. Kwa kwa kwa kwa! The roaring sound was a huge amount of water pouring down.

"Huck, w-water!"

The Fire Draconians screamed and stepped back. The hot spring water flowed down the hill into a pit that Ark had dug. Ark's Excavation skill.....it managed to dig a hole 30 metres big. Both Ark and Cell were trapped in the pool of water.

"T-this is....."

The slippery, slimy pudding like monster with maggots couldn't swim in water. The pudding wriggled as it floated in the water.

"Now, shall I slowly release my resentment?"

Ark bit the 'Mermaid Scale' and laughed. Then Ark shot forward like an arrow. He didn't use any special skills. He just ran forward and swung his sword. Cell freaked out and tried to avoid it but all he could do was

wriggle in the water. There was a splash as the sword fell and Cell was cut in the side.

“Kuak, y-you bastard.....”

“Huhuhu, I’m slightly strong in water.”

In fact, the place where Ark discovered the hot spring wasn’t here but on the hill above it. However, Ark had been worried after finding the hot springs. Obviously he could reveal the identity of the devil using the hot springs. But it would be insignificant if he wouldn’t 100% defeat the devil. The idea Ark came up with was to use a ‘sacrificial rite.’ He found water after such a long time so shouldn’t he take advantage of it? The hot springs which appeared under the mountain was dozens of metres deep. By making a channel into the pit, he blocked it off to build a sort of dam. After luring the devil to the pit, he ordered the blockage to be broken which allowed the water to flow down from the top.

‘If it is an underwater battle then I have confidence against any opponent!’

Ark was already an expert at fighting underwater. He had the Guardian Armour of the Merpeople which invalidate the water penalty by 100%. Thanks to that, there was no opponent who could fight equally with Ark underwater. Once the pudding was in the water, it couldn’t even move let alone attack.

“You’re screwed now!”

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

Ark hurled attacks at Cell like an evening shower. After a few minutes, Cell’s health had already reached the bottom.

‘What the? Even if it is a level 300 monster, isn’t this too easy?’

Is this really the devil which trapped the Fire Draconians for hundreds of years? No, isn’t there something strange?’

The battle was proceeding so easily that Ark made an upset face. Then Cell seemed to melt and disappear after being hit by Dark Blade. No, it happened when he thought Cell disappeared.

“What, what the?”

Ark’s eyes showed his shock.

Syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk!

Ark looked at the Fire Draconians. Cell had appeared among them. Its eyeball rolled around and it laughed in a grotesque voice before speaking.

“Kukukuku, I used teleportation while you were running wild.

You fool, it was impossible to beat me the moment you entered this place. Now do you want to wander eternally while your soul is slowly absorbed or you can choose to die immediately? If you die immediately then it will just allow me to absorb your soul quicker. Just like the stupid Fire Draconians.”

“U-unbelievable.....!”

Ark now noticed the subtle feeling of goose bumps. In New World, a warning message always popped up whenever a boss monster appeared. However, that message didn’t appear when he encountered Cell. In other words, Cell was not the real devil inside Dragonian.

“Aaaaack, you evil bastard!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

While Ark was thinking that, Cell started attacking the Fire Draconians. But Ark just watched with a soulless expression. No, to be exact he was looking at Cell’s body. While Cell wasn’t the devil, it was obviously a part of the body. Unless the body was destroyed, Ark wouldn’t be able to escape from Dragonian.

‘If Cell is a part of the devil’s body then the devil should be somewhere around here. Where the hell is it.....?’

Ark avoided Cell’s attack and surveyed the situation until he had a sudden flash. He realized why his nerves had been subtly irritated. So far Ark had managed to walk around undetected by the Fire Draconians and the devil. Then how could the devil steal Ark’s stats? Ark’s stats were stolen while he was away from Cell who had been hiding among the Fire Draconians. In other words, the power of the devil worked inside this entire space. Yet Cell wasn’t able to find Ark. That meant the devil was able to steal Ark’s stats but it couldn’t know where his location was. It wasn’t logical.

“It was also strange when I entered Dragonian. I was looking for the entrance when I suddenly felt a sucking sensation and fell inside.....huck, don’t tell me? Oh my god, if that’s true then the devil has tricked us from the beginning!”

Ark raised his head at the thought and winced. The conclusion he came to seemed like nonsense. But this was a game so anything could happen. Moreover, Ark had already seen an existence like this before! When he realized this, Ark had to change the direction of his thoughts by 180 degrees. Yes, he absolutely couldn’t win against Cell and the devil like this. From the beginning he couldn’t defeat the devil and escape from Dragonian. Conversely, escaping from this place meant it might be possible to defeat the devil. Ark’s thoughts inside his head turned at 700 kilometres per hour.

“Then the way to get out of this place.....?”

He pushed back Cell using Riposte and looked around. Ark had received fall damage when he entered. That meant the entrance was somewhere in the ceiling. Normally it would be impossible to escape that way but Ark guessed there was another method.

“Hey Fire Draconians!”

Ark shouted from the hot springs.

“You know that I’m not the devil. You might’ve forgotten but Lumines is the sole survivor of the Fire Draconians and he asked me to save your souls! But everybody needs to help me to accomplish this purpose!”

“Ack, w-what?”

The Fire Draconians asked while avoided Cell’s attacks.

“Your fire. Please work together to pour your flames into the hot springs!”

“Into the hot spring?”

“There is no time to explain! Please trust me and follow my instructions!”

The Fire Draconians were confused but they looked at the hot springs after hearing Ark’s desperate voice. They took a deep breath and blew out fire. The fire of 29 Fire Draconians hit the hot spring, causing it to heat up and exude a massive amount of water vapour. After a while, so much vapour had risen that nothing could be seen in front of him. Then the ground convulsed and shook. Ark ran out of the water vapour and stared up at the ceiling.

‘That’s it!’

Kukukuku, kueeeeeeee-!

A giant door seemed to open in the ceiling. With a roar, the surrounding water vapour was continuously pushed up to the ceiling.

“Now Radun. The hang glider!”

Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

“Razak transform into a sword, Racard ride the air currents and follow!”

Ark grabbed Razak and ran with his full strength before jumping. Then he pushed his hang glider and rode the air current to the ceiling. He was pushed by the water vapour and seemed to be flung at the ceiling. Ark rode the air current up through the doors until he turned around and

landed on a nearby floating land. At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

-The soul predator boss monster 'Soul Eater' has appeared!

"Indeed.....!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The enormous stone mountain in front of Ark that contained Dragonian started to collapse. Once the rocks fell down, it revealed the huge shape of the devil which resembled a catfish. Just like its name Soul Eater, it was made out of a translucent material resembling gelatine and had a huge size. The forts, buildings and hot springs were all inside it..... Surprisingly, it was Dragonian before Ark. Yes, Ark and Dragonian had been inside the huge Soul Eater the whole time. If Dragonian was inside Soul Eater then everything started making sense to Ark. While he had been drawn inside Dragonian, the sucking sensation was similar to what he felt when he was swallowed by the White Whale Gallic. Since he was inside the stomach, the monster was able to absorb his stats.

'Cell is just a parasite that lives inside!'

Yes, Cell was similar to the worm like parasites which lived inside Gallic. The difference between Cell and the worms was that Cell was mentally controlled by the catfish. The Soul Eater couldn't look inside itself so it used Cell to keep an eye on the Fire Draconians.

'The level 500 monster which swallowed Dragonian is the devil's true identity!'

That was the reason why Ark used the hot springs to create water vapour. There was suddenly a huge amount of water vapour within the stomach. Naturally the Soul Eater would have to expel all the air. In other words, Ark made a situation where the Soul Eater would have no choice but to burp. He then used the hang glider to ride the air current from the burp and came outside.

“Heh, who would’ve thought the devil would look like this?”

-Kuaaak, you bastard!

The Soul Eater took off its outer shell and was completely exposed. Ark was overwhelmed by the colossal size of the Soul Eater. It was a monster large enough to swallow a 4~5 kilometre city! Gallic seemed like a child next to the humongous Soul Eater. It was to the extent that somebody didn’t even have to be on the battlefield to see the Soul Eater from a distance away. It was also level 500! Since the Soul Eater had devoured his stats, Ark was currently around level 300. It was a 200 level difference.

“M-Master.....”

Racard stuttered as he trembled away from the enormous size and the level difference. However, Ark’s eyes just shone with an eerie light as he stared at the Soul Eater.

“It is rice!”

“Eh?”

Racard made a stupid face at Ark’s cry.

“What nonsense are you saying? Did you suffer while inside that thing?”

“You idiot, please see straight. That guy is my meal!”

“Meal? It is a catfish. The pot isn’t big enough for the catfish. I think spicy catfish soup is too.....”

“That’s not it! Look at the translucent, gelatine like skin and how similar it is to the wendigoes!”

“What are you.....hik! Master perhaps?”

“I’m going to devour it!”

Ark laughed crazily. Yes, the Soul Eater was just a huge monster with a soul body. And a soul body monster was like a pill giving Ark Spiritual Power. The level and size was all unnecessary. To Ark the Soul Eater was just a huge lump of Spiritual Power.

“That huge body.....how much Spiritual Power will it give me?”

Ark drooled as he stared at the Soul Eater. Then dozens of tentacles sprouted from the Soul Eater’s body.

Swiiiiik, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the tentacles stretched out hundreds of metres and struck a rock, it instantly turned to powder. Ark immediately threw his body and wrapped the Saw blade around a rock. Then he rose in a parabola and swung to another stone using his Saw blade. It was the whip action Indiana Jones used several times. Ark flew across the sky using the whip and stared at the Soul Eater. After a short time, an arrow appeared on top of the Soul Eater’s head.

“Lock on! Soul Extortion!”

At the same time, a hand stretched out from Ark and grabbed the skin of the Soul Eater. Normally the 200 level difference meant that his sword wouldn’t really hit properly. However, Soul Extortion which grabbed some of the soul was unrelated to the level. When the hand grabbed the skin, there was a loud tearing sound and the skin was torn. And the Soul Eater let out a pained scream.

“Eh? What the?”

Ark looked at the piece of Soul Eater’s skin with stunned eyes. With one single blow, several hundred metres of the Soul Eater’s skin had been torn. It seemed a little extreme for his level of Soul Extortion. But Ark soon discovered the reason why. The sections of skin were so thin that they were only a few millimetres.

“This guy, is he totally empty on the outside?”

Yes, the Soul Eater was a huge monster but it wasn't 4~5 kilometres. Its original size was only a few hundred metres. However, it was a soul body so it could be expanded or reduced freely. So it could inflate its body like a balloon to swallow Dragonian. That's why the skin was only a few millimetres thick. On the other hand, Soul Extortion was a skill which allowed him to rip out a certain amount of the opponent's soul. So he peeled off a wide but thin piece.

-Kuaaak, this human dares!

When a whole bunch of skin was ripped off, the Soul Eater swung even more tentacles at him. Ark swung his whip and ran away but the tentacles destroyed several pieces of land, making the places he could escape to disappear. When there was no longer any place to move then he would receive simultaneous attacks from the tentacles.

"Sheesh, is this a level 500 monster?"

Ark bit his lip and glared at the Soul Eater. It was so large that he could close his eyes to shot an arrow and it would still hit. However, the range of Soul Extortion was only 20~30 metres. Once outside that range then Ark couldn't use Soul Extortion at all. By moving between different pieces of land, he couldn't stay within range.

"Besides, the pieces of floating land are quickly decreasing. If I'm hit by the tentacles then I will fall into the lava. Some way....."

Ark looked around for a while before looking at the Soul Eater again and laughed.

"Aha, can't I use that as a springboard to attack?"

Then a tentacle separated the wind and fell. The tentacles turned a land mass to powder. But Ark didn't care about the land masses anymore. The Soul Eater rolled its eyes and surveyed the area. Then it found Ark unexpectedly hanging from a tentacle using the Saw blade. The moment the tentacle had hit the land mass, Ark had transferred to the tentacle. The Soul Eater roared and struck its tentacle into the lava. Red lava flew up as the tentacles impacted with it. Ark

used his flexibility to jump between the tentacles. When compared to the Soul Eater, the tentacles were 10 metres thick. Ark used 'Sprint' to run up the tentacles. When Ark ran up, dozens of tentacles instantly dived towards him.

"Hey, you idiot! Where do you think you're looking? Block his gaze!"

"B-but that guy is so large....."

"Do you think dying to him is better? Or do you want me to kill you?"

"Ugh, damnnnnnn!"

Racard closed his eyes tightly and used Dark Dash at Ark's threat. And.....

Puk!

-Kuaaaaaaaah!

The Soul Eater suddenly screamed and emitted a light. When Racard had used Dark Dash, he literally embedded himself into the Soul Eater's eyeball. The Soul Eater had swelled up several hundred metres like a balloon. Racard was just like a piece of dust next to it. However, even a piece of dust could make a big difference when stuck in the eyes.

"Eh? What? Isn't this plain water?"

-This flying bastard.....come out right now.....

"Fly? How dare a balloon demon like you insult a noble vampire? You, you!"

-Kuaaaack, come out!

The huge Soul Eater stumbled from Racard's attack. Racard swam around in the Soul Eater's eyeballs and punched away. The Soul Eater screamed painfully and tried to hit Racard with his tentacle, but all it did was hit its own eyeball.

“Okay, that’s good!”

Meanwhile Ark had been travelling along the Soul Eater’s tentacles.

“Huhuhu, there’s no need to worry now.”

Racard jumped around and used Soul Extortion continuously. Thanks to Racard poking around in the eyeball, Ark could jump around to tear off pieces of skin. Whenever it was hit, the Soul Eater would yell out and stamp its feet. The space shook and lava flew up everywhere. But that wasn’t a problem for Ark since he was on the Soul Eater’s body.

“Ooooooh!”

“That devil swallowed Dragonian.....”

“He’s eating! A human is eating the devil!”

The Fire Draconians who had fought against Cell in the stomach exclaimed. Since the rocks surrounded the Soul Eater had collapsed, the Fire Draconians were watching the battle through the transparent skin. And the scene was a small human overwhelming the hundreds of kilometres wide Soul Eater.

Syu syu syu syuk, syu syu syu syuk!

When Ark had torn nearly half of the Soul Eater’s skin, dozens more tentacles appeared. But these tentacles were much easier to avoid. He didn’t need to jump around the land masses and the Soul Eater couldn’t see Ark so it couldn’t hit him.

“Your mistake is inflated your body you stupid catfish. Soul Extortion!”

Ark avoided the recklessly flying tentacles and peeled off the skin.

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!

<Spiritual Power +1>

-Your spirit has risen thanks to Soul Extortion!

<Spiritual Power +1>

His Spiritual Power gradually increased as the Soul Eater's body disappeared. When Ark used Soul Extortion to eat the soul, one side of its head faded away. With the Soul Eater in that state, a part of Dragonian inside the stomach shook and emerged. It was like a goldfish swimming in excrement. While Ark was jumping around and peeling the skin using Soul Extortion, he was concerned as the piece of Dragonian fell into the lava. At the same time, the lava welled up hundreds of metres.

"Eh?"

It was at that time. The Soul Eater suddenly deflated and shrunk. After decreasing to 100 metres in size and Dragonian emerged. Fortunately, Ark who had been on the Soul Eater's back wasn't damaged by the fall.

"That fellow!"

"It is the devil who deceived us for hundreds of years!"

When Dragonian appeared from the devil's stomach, Cell instantly disappeared. The Fire Draconians who had been fighting against Cell rushed towards the Soul Eater. Ark ran like the wind in front of them and shouted.

"Don't touch! It is mine!"

"What does that mean? For hundreds of years....."

"Mine!"

"Ack!"

He had to convert every last bit of the Soul Eater to Spiritual Power! Therefore he had to stop the Fire Draconians. The Fire Draconians flinched from Ark and retreated. Meanwhile Ark moved his eyes from the Fire Draconians towards the Soul Eater. The Soul Eater

that had been several kilometres in size had decreased to 100 metres and it looked completely like a wet rag. When Ark approached it tried to swing its tentacles but they just dropped and crumpled like a wet rag.

-Kuuuuuu.....don't come....stop.....!

Ark just hit the annoying tentacles with his sword and approached the Soul Eater. Then he raised his hands and said with a bright expression.

"I'll eat well."

.....His happy mealtime had started. Just like that, the Soul Eater which swallowed up Dragonian disappeared into Ark. When it only had 3% health left, a viscous liquid flowed out and the Demonic Seal information window disappeared. Ark glanced at the Soul Eater and stopped attacking.

"Demonic Seal.....should I make a cursed japtem or eat it? No, my Spiritual Power won't rise that much with the remaining portions. And the cursed japtem has surprising uses so shouldn't I create it this once? Demonic Seal!"

Ark used the remaining soul to seal into one of the swords he picked up in Oberium. At the same time, a stream of message windows appeared.

-You have received 30% additional experience for using Demonic Seal.
-The source of the wicked power disappeared and the absorbed stats will be returned!
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

When he defeated a level 500 boss he instantly gained 9 levels. Moreover, he had gained 170 Spiritual Power just from eating one Soul Eater. The gelatine like Soul Eater was a monster who gave him a bunch of nutrition.

"Now shall I check out the loot?"

A bunch of items were scattered around where the Soul Eater died.

-Nightmare Sealed Old Sword

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 7~10 (+60) Durability: 2

Weight: 45 User restriction: Level 250 and higher

A sword used by ancient warriors of Oberium. However, the sword has absorbed the demonic magic and changed its nature. The enchanted magic within the sword has enough energy to destroy an opponent. At the same time, the sword's durability has weakened because of the magic. In addition, the user will be affected by the curse and will receive constant damage until it is destroyed.

* Cannot be repaired, reinforced, enchanted or unequipped.

* Greater demon [Soul Eater] sealing effect.

<Soul Eater: When using the magic of the Soul Eater to attack, you can deal strong mental damage.

When mentally attacking the opponent, there is a chance to deal 1~3000 damage to mana and there is also a 50% chance to steal a random stat from the opponent>

-Skin of a Greater Demon (Rare, Material)

<Advanced Leatherwork skill is required to view the detailed information>

(Number: 5)

"Oh, what is this?"

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the sword. It was a boss monster so he had expected a good effect. The result was a perfect bingo! An option he never imagined had appeared when he sealed the Soul

Eater. Damage to mana and a 50% chance to steal stats from the opponent? When considering the absorption ability of the Soul Eater, it really was a cheat like option.

“But it only has 2 durability so just using it 10 times will destroy it.

Since the probability is 50%, I’ll probably only get between 5~10 points before the sword breaks. When thinking about it like that, the option is not that great. Damn, it would be an absurd sword if the durability was higher.”

Ark packed the sword with a regretful face.

“But what is this? Even though I defeated a boss monster.....”

Aside from the sword, it seemed like the Soul Eater only dropped one option. It was a rare material item. Ark had expected a lot more from a level 500 boss.

“Wait? Didn’t something seem to shine and fall when that guy died? This skin isn’t shiny. Then there is still something left?”

Ark looked around carefully. But he couldn’t find a special item not matter where he looked.

“That’s strange? Am I wrong?”

Ark asked as he tilted his head to one side.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark looked around restlessly when Radun suddenly appeared. Radun entered a small gap in a rock and then an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-Radun has acquired ‘Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

“Oh, so it rolled in there! Well done Radun!”

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Ark stroked his head while Radun shook his tail eagerly.

“Now please throw it up. I want to check out the information.”

Radun immediately opened his mouth at Arks’ order.....ssak! Throw up.....ssak! Throw up....he couldn’t. No matter how many times he tried, the Burning Heart couldn’t be spat out. Ark thought something was wrong and tried to hold Radun upside down but it was no use. Then Radun was covered in dead skin and the information window appeared.

-Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

Your pet Radun ate a special item which is producing changes in his body.

As an Alamone, the secret of growth for that species is still unknown. It cannot be confirmed what type of changes the item would bring but it will become evident when the ‘Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian’ will be completely absorbed. However, Radun’s current ability does not allow him to completely digest the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. It will take some time until Radun can completely digest the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

<Presently digested: 1%>

“Eh? What is this?”

Ark read the information window with a stupid expression. He had forgotten. Radun could grow using specific items. Then wasn’t Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian similar to the Fruit of Basium that Radun ate before?

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak!

After seeing Ark’s expression, Radun dropped his head like someone who committed a sin and apologized. But Ark just laughed and shook his head.

“No, you did well.”

He couldn't think of another purpose for the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian aside from as a growth item. The reason Ark bore a grudge against Radun when he ate the Fruit of Basium was because he couldn't use Radun's Item Storage. But this time there didn't seem to be such restrictions. Furthermore, he didn't need to find something else to assist the digestion of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

"Then there's no problem. Radun, since you've already ate it then try your best to digest it."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun's eyes sparkled as he received praise instead of hostility.

"Huhuhu, you cutie. My pet is too charming. Now everything is finished....eh, what the?"

It was at that time. He suddenly felt a pain as both wrists throbbed. Ark frowned and looked down with confusion.

"Eh? T-this.....?"

The pain he felt was from the tattoos on his wrist. It was the trademark of 'Eternal Soul.' The tattoos burned and a light was suddenly emitted from it. After a moment, cracks appeared in the tattoos as it started spreading. A new information window then appeared when the new tattoos sunk into his skin.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

[Demonic Response II]: Eternal Soul stage 3 (Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When you find a demonic response, you will deal 20% additional damage against demonic monsters and the probability of resisting the demonic attribute will increase by 30%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic

power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, +20% damage against demonic monsters and 30% resistance to demonic attribute>

[Demonic Detection]: Eternal Soul stage 4 (Active)

A technique which can read the flow of demonic power. It is possible to read the flow of demonic power within a 100 metre radius in order to find the location of the demon. By cutting off the flow of demonic energy inside the body of the demon, you can deal fatal damage. Demons who receive a direct blow to their demonic energy will receive 100~1000 damage and have their defense temporarily reduced.

<When your insight into the demon reaches +50 points, you can deal 100~1000 damage and reduce defense.

Spiritual Power consumption: 50>

“Eh? Eternal soul?”

He hadn't considered that Eternal Soul would awaken. But Ark was able to understand most of the methods to awaken the Eternal Soul after this. It wasn't surprising that Eternal Soul would awaken whenever he dealt with monsters of the demonic attribute. And every time Eternal Soul awakened, one tattoo on each wrist would be unsealed.

“At first I thought it was a coincidence but now it is certain that two seals are released every time. One gives a passive skill which will increase my abilities while increasing my resistance to the demonic attribute. The other seal will give an active skill which such as Demonic Seal or Demonic Detection which could assist in fighting monsters. But now Demonic Detection.....”

Ark smiled wryly at the information window. It was a skill for detecting demonic energy and finding demons. If he had this skill before then he could've discovered the Soul Eater instantly. Wasn't that just a case of receiving the skill after the need was over? It also appeared too late when he was dealing with Karma.....However, he discovered that there

was more to the skills learnt after the seals were released. In New World it was possible to change to the 3rd stage profession. In other words, there was still one profession left after Dark Soul. And Eternal Soul was probably the profession after Dark Soul. So releasing the seals quickly was a good thing.

“Anyway, has all my business here finished?”

Ark looked up at the clear, blue sky with a refreshed look. The black dome which had been present on Hwaryong Mountain for hundreds of years had disappeared. When the Soul Eater disappeared, Dragonian was also returned to normal. All the pieces of land which had been floating around the chaos space for hundreds of years re-joined with Dragonian. The lava now only circled Dragonian like it was an architectural feature. The reason for this was because the Soul Eater had broken the surrounding pieces of land when fighting Ark. When Dragonian returned to normal, Lumines instantly appeared.

“Existences born in the presence of fire, go to your eternal rest!”

Lumines used the purification power of his flames on the souls of the Fire Draconians and they disappeared. After ensuring that all the souls were gone, Lumines walked over to Ark.

“I really thank you.”

Lumines said with an expression mixed with sadness and joy. He was happy that the souls were freed after hundreds of years but felt grief when they had to leave.

“It is just lucky that I could help.”

“It’s regrettable but this will be the last time I see you.”

“Huh?”

Ark asked Lumines who replied.

"I've been protecting this place for hundreds of years. I said I am the only survivor but I should've died a long time ago. But I couldn't bear to leave the souls of my kin enslaved by the devil so I used to holy power of the Oracle to live. Now that the souls of the Fire Draconians have been liberated, I will also move on to that place."

"Then the Fire Draconians.....?"

"We probably won't appear in this world anymore."

Lumines murmured with a sad expression. The Fire Draconian who had been waiting hundreds of years for the curse to be released also knew the whole time that it meant the extinction of his clan. But then Lumines shook his head and gave a small smile.

"Obviously the Fire Draconians will disappear from this world when I am gone. But I don't think it is the end of the Fire Draconians.

The will of the Fire Draconians will live on through you."

"Huh? What are you.....?"

"I've been worried for a long time while looking at the wards. Even our enemies didn't care about this place until you came with Valderas' keepsake. And you used great strength and courage to free the souls of the Fire Draconians. You have shown me everything a true hero requires. As the last Oracle of the Fire Draconians, I have the responsibility to compensate you for what you have done."

'Quest reward?'

Ark's eyes lit up like a lantern. In fact, Ark didn't really have any interest in Lumines' extinction. To be honest, there was nothing he could do so why should he mourn? He had been worried about the reward for completing the quest while listening to Lumines' words. But this atmosphere seemed like he was going to receive something.

"Come along."

Lumines turned around and headed towards a castle in Dragonian.

‘What will he give? I’ve saved the Fire Draconians so shouldn’t the reward be pretty good? Of course it will be good. How much did I have to struggle before completing it?’

Ark was filled with anticipation as he followed. Lumines guided Ark to the centre of the castle where some stone statues resembling the Fire Draconians were lined up in a circle. Lumines indicated towards an altar in the centre of the statues and said.

“Step up to that altar.”

‘Eh? What? He’s not giving an item? Perhaps it is the ‘Blessing of Fire’ again?’

The atmosphere turned fiery. Of course, Blessing of Fire gave him extra fire and burn resistance. And he thought he would receive Blessing of Fire again when he had entered the wards. But it took almost ten days to complete the quest. Well, he did waste one week consuming the wendigoes. Anyway, didn’t he suffer a crisis in Dragonian from the decreased stats? If he went through such troubles then Blessing of Fire alone wouldn’t be sufficient. Then Lumines slammed his staff into the ground and shouted.

“Original fire, please bless this chosen hero with your sacred fire!”

It was at that time. The statues of the Fire Draconians lined up started to spin. They all faced the altar where their mouths opened and streams of fire emerged. He was subjected to flames from dozens of statues! While Ark was in the midst of the flames, there was a white light and the information window popped up.

-Thanks to the sacred altar fire, you have learnt the ‘Descent of the Fire Draconian’ skill!

[Descent of the Fire Draconian]: Divine Skill

After being blessed by the sacred altar fire, you are the brave warrior

selected who can use the Fire Draconian's ultimate skill. Descent of the Fire Draconian is a revered skill which causes an explosion of sudden power. This skill is only meant for one person to use. It has been passed down through generations of Guardians protecting the temple. When using Descent of the Fire Draconian, you will accept the holy power into your body which will cause an 'Immortal Fire Draconian' effect.

<Immortal Fire Draconian>

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.
- * Attack speed, movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.
- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

<Spiritual Power consumption: 400>

-You have learnt a Divine skill.

The Divine skill is a high ranking skill passed down from ancient forgotten gods. The only way humans can learn this skill is through the ancient secret arts. In addition, tremendous energy is needed to use the power of the gods. Therefore humans can only use the Divine skill in special areas. It is the skill which can amplify the user's abilities, Area Declaration.

* Divine skill can only be used within the Area Declaration territory of your profession.

If you leave the area after using the Divine skill then its effects would disappear.

'D-divine skill!'

Ark's mouth dropped at the sight of the information window. It was a skill with 5 different effects. Moreover, the effects were so strong it was like an advanced skill. Especially the one where he dealt 1000 fire damage while recovering 50% of his health. There was also a 50% increase in all types of speed! And the additional fire damage! The fire resistance also increased for all his party members! Enemies who attacked him would also receive fire damage! It wasn't an exaggeration to say that he was almost invincible for the 10 minutes the skill was activated.

'It is truly worthy of being called a Divine skill!'

The Divine skill Ark had experienced before was the 'Indra's Lightning' that the Red Man had used. It was an enormous magic which took care of Ark, Shambala and Lariette with one blow! Just like the name 'Immortal Fire Draconian,' he was certainly immortal while the Divine skill was triggered. However, there was a fatal weakness in the Divine skill. It was only available within the territory of Area Declaration. That is to say, it was a meaningless skill if he couldn't use Area Declaration. If he knew that information in advance then he wouldn't have lost so badly against the Red Man.

'Even though a user might know the weakness, I can take advantage of it when fighting against monsters. If I'm fighting a really strong monster then I can use it to win.'

"Now it is like you are a Fire Draconian."

"I will use it wisely for the honour of the Fire Draconians."

Lumines thought for a short time after Ark's answer before talking again.

".....Can I ask you for one last favour?"

'A favour?'

Was his true colours revealed after giving Ark something? However, he always welcomed the request of an NPC. A request from an NPC meant

a quest. Although he hadn't received any money from the Fire Draconian's quests, he did receive a lot of stat increase.

"Please say it. I am already a member of the honourable Fire Draconian clan."

"Thank you. You've proven your courage and capabilities through rescuing the Fire Draconians. I believe in your courage and capabilities so I want to ask this of you. The other day I said that Magura stole the Immortal Book which had been house in the Fire Draconian's temple. The Immortal Book is an ancient treasure of the Fire Draconians that I can't stand to see in Magura's hands. Please look for the Immortal Book."

"Magura.....I understand. Where is he?"

Ark asked with a questioning expression. But Lumines just shook his head and sighed.

"I do not know the details. The only clue is this slab left behind when Valderas returned to Dragonian. I've been trying to find clues using this slab but I still haven't figured it out."

Lumines took out a small stone tablet. An eerie aura surrounded it and it seemed like blood was flowing from the back. Lumines might not know the exact location but he did have a clue.

"I understand."

Ark nodded and the quest information window updated.

-The quest has been updated.

Souls of the Fire Draconians= Demon Magura!

The demon Magura was one of the demons who spearheaded the Dark Lord's attacks. Hundreds of years ago, Magura led astray one of the Fire Draconians which led to their destruction. You must find the Immortal Book that Magura stole from the Fire Draconians and take it back. If you

find the demon Magura then you will also find clues to the Dark Lord.

<Difficulty: ☆☆☆ Quest Restriction: Completion of Home of the Fire Draconian III quest>

-Bloody Slate (Quest Item)

A carved slate with ancient characters written using the blood of a demon.

<200 Knowledge of Ancient Relics is needed to confirm the item>

‘A Lore quest!’

The degree of difficulty indicated that it was a lore quest. These quests were deeply associated with the history of New World. When he had previously completed Lore quests, he had been given stars as a special reward. Ark had currently gathered 7 of them. If he completed the Magura quest then he would receive 10.

‘I don’t know what kind of compensation will be given.....’

When considering the degree of difficulty with his Lore quests so far, the reward shouldn’t be trivial.

‘I have to settle this. But I can’t find Magura until I can decipher the slate? I need to wait until I have 200 points in Knowledge of Ancient Relics.’

“I understand. I will be happy to solve the feud of the Fire Draconians!”

“I believe.....”

Lumines sluggishly nodded at Ark’s answer. Then his eyes closed. His body then turned to stone like the other Fire Draconians before there was a crack and the statue turned to powder. He was moving on just like he said. So all the missions were solved but the Fire Draconians had become extinct. Ark looked at the powder and clicked his tongue.

“Somehow there is a bitter aftertaste to this quest.”

Ark murmured with an uncomfortable expression. While all the other statues had turned to powder and scattered, only Lumines' pile of powder stayed in one spot.

"Is he not leaving this place even after dying? Maybe Magura's curse on the Fire Draconians also had an effect on Lumines. Elemental sword, Wind attribute!"

Ark thought it was slightly pitiful and used his Elemental Sword wind attribute. He created wind using his sword to blow Lumines' ashes over Hwaryong Mountain.

"Now he's probably free. Uh? What the, this is?"

Ark tilted his head to one side as the powder flew away. When he blew away Lumines' powder, a large skull appeared. At first he thought it was a simple skull but when he approached closely he realized it wasn't ordinary. He looked at the information window.

-Fire Draconian Skull (Rare, Material)

<It is impossible to confirm the information on Fire Draconian skull>

'What the? A material item?'

Ark hadn't expected to find an item when Lumines had left. Anyway, Razak showed extreme interest when a bone was found. However, Lumines' skull was 3 metres. If Razak put on this skull then it would be impossible for him to move. Razak looked at the skull for a long time before sighing and shaking his head.

'Heh, even Razak realizes the bone can't be used. But it is a rare material item so it will probably become useful.'

Ark put away the skull and left Dragonian. Then Dragonian started to shake. Cracks spread through the ground and lava emerged everywhere. And it gradually sank into the lava.

Act 6: Dark Soul VS Beast Master

“That was fairly profitable.”

Ark smiled warmly at his bags. At first he thought it would be easily solved but the work had taken ten days. But this time he didn't think it was a waste of time. No, it was a highly profitable ten days. During the ten days it took to devour the wendigoes and Soul Eater, his Spiritual Power had increased by 549! Currently Ark had 956 Spiritual Power. He never thought it would be a number that was possible. There was also the Blessing of Fire and Descent of the Fire Draconian skills after the quest completion. But was that all? He also carried the Fire Stone and rare Hearthstone he found in Dragonian. Since the wendigoes were level 300~350, he didn't gain that much experience despite all the time hunting but he still managed to gain 9 levels. The results were more of a jackpot than he expected.

“Honestly, at first I thought I had made a mistake.”

When he first entered the chaos space and hunted the wendigoes, he hadn't made that much profit. If he hadn't figured out Soul Extortion then he wouldn't have been able to survive the wendigoes and the Soul Eater.

‘As expected, I can't throw away any skills. When I first received Soul Extortion, I thought it was just a skill I would seal up. Excavation was also like that but there is a way to make use of all of them. Besides.....’

While hunting the wendigoes in the chaos space, he received half as much experience and items. It was to the extent that his bags were bursting with japtem.

‘Some rare ingredients were dropped by the Soul Eater but everything else are relatively cheap items. There are several magic items with the japtem so I should receive at least 100 gold for it. What should I do next after organizing all the japtem?’

He had finished all Fire Draconians' quests. He couldn't complete the Demon Magura quest because he needed more Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

"Once in town then I can gather more information about new quests and dungeons. I've come to Bristania after a long time so I should do everything possible."

Ark decided on a plan for the future and descended Hwaryong Mountain. Then he found a small cave hidden on the bottom of the mountain. This cave was a safety zone that he found while looking for the Fire Draconians. No matter how many monsters wandered around New World, there were always hidden safety zones present. The place that Ark told Buksil to wait was this cave.

'Ten days have passed so I wonder what Buksil has been doing?'

Once he was on the mountain than that person would have no motivation. Buksil who had lost Baekgu had been causing Ark quite a lot of stress. Ark entered the cave to look for Buksil. Then his foot caught on something and he fell down.

'Huh? What is this?'

He looked down and saw an empty bottle of alcohol.

'What the? This liquor bottle? That brat Buksil. Was he drinking while I wasn't here?'

Ark made a disgusted face and kicked the empty bottle. It wasn't just one. Empty bottles were scattered on the ground at the entrance of the cave while boxes of alcohol were also piled up. It was at least hundreds of bottles! The cave seemed like an alcohol warehouse.

'This cheeky bastard. I told him to gather ingredients instead of just waiting around..... Yet now he's having a drinking party? He lost his head completely after being depressed. Where on earth did he get this much alcohol.....'

Ark was grinding his teeth together when he suddenly realized something.

‘Wait? That guy. Where did he get the money to buy this much alcohol?’

Even if a merchant like Buksil entered a village to buy it, alcohol was quite expensive in New World. The cheapest bottle was at least 2~3 gold. In some cases, it wasn’t rare for a bottle to go for 10 gold. Even hundreds of bottles of cheap alcohol would cost several hundred gold. Buksil only received a small allowance from Ark so he wouldn’t have hundreds of gold. Then what was with these bottles?

‘Don’t tell me that bastard.....?’

“Ah no! There is no way! That Buksil bastard!”

Ark shrieked as he thought of the worst situation and dived into the cave. He quickly arrived at the campsite inside the cave.

‘.....?’

An improbably scene was unfolding in front of his eyes.

“Kuah. Good! Hehehe!”

Buksil rubbed at the fat on his stomach and set the bottle down. It was good up to that point. Ark’s eyes popped out at the other people present.

“Uwah, uwah, the alcohol is good, the alcohol is good!”

His eyes felt like it would fall out from looking around so much. On one side was a pair drinking alcohol and Baekgu who he thought had become dog soup in Bosaga. It was incomprehensible. But this was not the end.

“Hahaha, is it delicious? Delicious?”

“Wah, it is absolutely delicious. It is the first time I’ve tasted something so good.”

“Oh, you understand the taste of alcohol. I really do like you!”

The huge figure who patted Baekgu’s back while holding the alcohol bottle was Bread.

“Hey, don’t do that. I don’t want dog hair to fly in this narrow area!”

The woman who threw the bottle at Bread was his partner Redian. People he never expected were gathered inside the cave and having a drinking party. Now all their eyes simultaneously concentrated on Ark when he ran in yelling.

“.....”

An awkward silence flowed within the cave for a short time.

‘W-What on earth is going on?’

Ark was the one who showed a response first. But Ark ignored Baekgu, Bread and Redian and just headed towards Buksil. Ark grabbed Buksil’s collar and shook him.

“You, you bastard. What is going on?”

“Ouch, what, what the?”

“The alcohol bottles! Did you buy then alcohol bottles with my money? Did you sell them? Did you sell them? Did you sell my japtem?”

Yes, that was the reason Ark rushed in. It wasn’t necessary to say again but Buksil was Ark’s personal cameraman. The japtem that Ark gathered was left in Buksil’s bag. Ark was worried that Buksil would’ve emptied out the bag while he was gone for a week. If Buksil disposed of all those items then wouldn’t he receive hundreds of gold? Normally he wouldn’t have thought of that. There was a contract where Buksil would receive a huge penalty if he disposed of Ark’s goods selfishly. But the supposedly dead Baekgu was alive so he didn’t know what Buksil would do from the shock. Ark couldn’t see Baekgu, Bread or Redian

anymore. Now the most important thing was money! He needed to know if Buksil had really embezzled his money.

“Japtem? Sell? Heh!”

Buksil looked at him stupidly and snorted. Then he removed Ark’s hand and shrugged. Needless to say, it was possible to drink alcohol in New World. The person would return to normal after a bit, but they really were drunk while drinking. That was the state Buksil was in. Buksil had at least 10% alcohol in him judging by the smell and he shouted.

“You’re always like that. Money, money, money! Do your eyes only see money?”

“.....What, what the?”

“Baekgu has returned alive and the first thing you talk about is money? It’s always about earning money..... I’m tired of it! Damn! Yes, I sold a little bit of japtem and drank alcohol. Why? Can’t I do that? Can’t I drink a bit of alcohol after following you every day and being exploited? I sold all of it to buy alcohol. What will you do?”

‘He sold my japtem for the sake of drinking alcohol?’

Ark looked at Buksil dumbly. Then a cold voice emerged from his mouth.

“..... Do you want to live?”

Buksil flinched and took a step back but it was only for a brief moment.

“Why are you staring at me like that? Damn, I’m also a person too! You think I’m afraid after hearing your words? I’ve been enduring it so far. But now I can’t stand it. No, I won’t put up with it. Then go ahead and kill me! Do it, do it!”

Buksil lost his mind after drinking alcohol. Ark also lost his mind after hearing that his japtem was changed to alcohol. Ark looked at Buksil with anger and laughed before moving.

“..... Kill.”

“Kill? Yes, kill me!”

“Wait a moment!”

Then Bread pulled the collar of the excited pig and moved forward. He looked at Ark and said.

“That’s not it. Is there a reason to react like that in this situation? Don’t you know? Shouldn’t you react to my presence first?”

“.....Let go of the pig.”

“No, no, I won’t. No, there seems to be some misunderstanding about where this alcohol comes from. I’m the one who bought it, not him.”

“What?”

Ark’s eyes started to return to normal. Then Bread scratched his head and sighed.

“Hah. He didn’t know what was going on but he calmed down after that guy explained. He seemed to want to talk to Ark. “That’s right, I bought the alcohol for everybody. This guy just drank the alcohol. By the way, don’t you seem to be quite hated? He only drank a little bit yet he keeps on cursing you.”

“Is it true?”

“What? That he cursed you?”

“No, that my japtem is safe.”

He already knew that Buksil was full of complaints. Naturally the talk about his japtem would be more important for him.

“Why would I lie about it? Do you want to see the receipts?”

Ark gave a huge sigh of relief. After that, he finally realized that the people in front of him were Bread and Redian.

“By the way, why are you guys here?”

“You finally asked.”

“This bastard, what do you want? Are you now holding hostages?”

“Hostages?”

“Aren’t they hostages? Then why are you here with Buksil?”

Then Buksil shouted angrily from behind Bread.

“Hey, don’t mess with him. Bread is the one who brought Baekgu back!”

“What?”

“Let’s clear up the situation. Please sit down. I’ll explain.”

Bread put the liquor bottle away and indicated a seat. Ark looked at Bread and hesitated. He hadn’t noticed it because of Buksil but the situation was quite serious. Bread and Redian were his enemies. And it would be difficult for Ark to avoid both their attacks in this narrow cave. He couldn’t guarantee his odds even in a 1-on-1 fight. It wasn’t necessary to talk about 2 against 1. But it wasn’t possible to run away. Even if he could get away, Bread already noticed the relationship between Ark and Buksil. If he didn’t then he wouldn’t be waiting for Ark in a place like this. The moment Ark tried to escape then Bread would use Buksil as a hostage.

‘By the way, Bread’s attitude seems a little different from before. He’s not attacking recklessly like last time.’

When Ark didn’t lower his guard to sit down, Bread explained the situation. The reason for this situation went all the way back to Bosaga village. When Ark had set the guards on Bread and Redian, they had planned to escape from Bosaga. They escaped the guards and hid around the outskirts of the village. They planned to track Ark when he

left the village. But it was the bandit group that caught Bread's attention. The thieves who missed Ark had captured Baekgu and dragged him out of the village. And then they hung him upside down and tortured him to get Ark's next destination.

"Then I appeared."

Bread bragged. Even though there were 10 thieves, Bread and Redian were furious about the animal cruelty. After rescuing Baekgu, they decided to return the pitiful dog to his owner. It was only after they asked Baekgu that they discovered he was in Ark's party.

'Isn't that like jumping from the frying pan to the fire? This stupid dog!'

Ark shot a glare at Baekgu who was just eating in a corner. However, Baekgu had his own reasons for telling them Ark's destination. Baekgu didn't tell the thieves Ark's destination no matter how much he was tortured. He knew the goal of the thieves was Buksil. However, Bread's goal was Ark. As long as Buksil was okay, he honestly didn't care what happened to Ark. But the biggest reason he blabbed about Ark's destination was to get back to Buksil.

"Ugh, Ark..... I'm disappointed."

Baekgu also smelt of alcohol.

"I heard everything from Bread-nim."

'Why is he referring to Bread so formally while talking informally to me?'

The dog crept closer to the pig when he saw Ark frowning. Since the entire group was drunk, Baekgu's nerves had become stronger.

"What are you looking at? Didn't Bread-nim ask you for an honourable warrior's fight during your confrontation at sea? Aren't you the one who deceived him using various lies and ran away? Are these the actions of Hero Maban's descendant? Aren't you embarrassed? I'm disappointed,

disappointed! Ah. The elder believed in you so much and even gave you the Three Marvel's fragment....."

"What? Embarrassed? Disappointed?"

Ark glared back. But Baekgu just snorted and took a gulp from the bottle. That's right. Baekgu had instantly blabbed about Ark's destination for this reason. Although he was branded a traitor, he still felt pride as a member of the honourable Wolrang clan. Furthermore, Bread was the one who saved him from the thieves. After Bread explained the reason why, Baekgu became indignant and guided Bread here for 'justice.'

"That's right. You made the mistake!"

Buksil shook an empty bottle and shouted. Ark's blood pressure instantly soared.

'These brats really.....!'

Buksil and Baekgu had waited with Bread for Ark. After one day, two days, three days..... They were bored waiting for Ark after such a long time so Bread decided on a drinking part and Baekgu and Buksil became drunk. Baekgu and Buksil then shouted in unison.

"Shameful! Coward! Accept a fair showdown!"

'This group is really annoying me.'

The pig and dog were causing a huge commotion. No, it was inevitable sooner or later. Right now the drunkards weren't the problem.

"Why is this happening? What did I do that made you pursue me like this?"

When Ark raised his voice angrily, Bread scratched his head and murmured.

"Well, that.... The reason is..... It doesn't matter right now. It is unrelated to why I'm here now. Since my competitive spirit has been fired up."

“Competitive spirit?”

“I can’t give up now that we’ve come this far. Isn’t that right?”

“That’s just you! This is a nuisance to me!”

Bread waved his hand with a serious expression.

“I’ve been reflecting.”

“Reflecting?”

“Yes, when I first met you I thought you were a cowardly guy who ran away. But I asked Baekgu. There was a situation then. You needed to create an Immortality Pill? I realized that I was wrong once I reflected. I just wanted to beat you to death without questioning the circumstances. Anyway, I will forget about the past after knowing the situation.... That’s why I went to the guild and prepared this.”

Bread took a scroll out of his bag and handed it to him.

-Warriors Challenge. Bread=Ark

High ranking members of the Warrior’s guild can issue this challenge.

The duel will proceed immediately when the opponent who receives this agrees. When the duel starts, nobody except for the users concerned can participate. Unlike regular PVP battles, no penalties are applied. You will not become chaotic if the opponent is killed. If you die then you won’t drop any items and will be revived on the spot. However the winner of the duel will take 500 fame from the loser.

<Winner: +500 Fame. Loser: -500 Fame>

“Now it doesn’t matter if you win or lose.”

Bread looked at Redian and confirmed it.

“Is this okay?”

"I don't know, I'm already tired of this."

"As expected, only you understand my feelings. I love you."

"Shut up you idiot."

Redian turned her head and nervously muttered while eating beef jerky. Bread grinned at her cute reaction and turned back to Ark.

"How about it? The conditions aren't bad right?"

"....."

Bread's suggest was very unexpected. Over the past month, Ark had been plagued by the thieves and Bread. The thieves were taken care of for the moment. Only Bread and Redian remained. But Bread was suddenly asking for a 1-on-1 showdown. He even prepared a duel challenge so there was no need to worry about the death penalty.

'This isn't a bad offer. If I win then I can even receive 500 fame. Although I don't have any choice but to accept!'

If Ark rejected the challenge then his relationship with the pair would continue to be hostile. Then he would have to fight against Bread and Redian on the spot. In such a situation, the percentage of victory was 0%.

"Okay, I accept the challenge."

"You made a good decision."

"So give me some time to prepare for the duel. I need to rest and repair my equipment. You should also sober up in case it affects your capabilities."

".....You're not going to run away again?"

"You would just kill me if I run away from a formal challenge."

"Oh, kill you? That would be a petty thing to do."

"Let's stop talking."

"I understand. Then let's start in 30 minutes."

Bread withdrew and started to inspect his bayonet and equipment. Ark also sat in a corner opposite Bread.

'I inevitably accepted the challenge but.....'

Ark was connected in his own way to PVP. Bread had considerably misunderstood a part of Ark's character. Ark had avoided fighting Bread so far because of two reasons. One reason was Redian and the other reason was the situation was also cursed whenever he encountered them. He had no choice but to run away but Ark's original character wasn't the type to avoid a fight. There was no reason to avoid a 1-on-1 fight without any penalties. No, Bread was clearly a quite difficult person. Now he didn't need to worry about the death penalty. But he hadn't accepted the challenge without thinking.

'.....If I fight then I have to win!'

Although there was no death penalty, he would still lose 500 fame if he lost. Losing 500 fame wasn't a small penalty.

'But the prospect of success isn't that high if I think about it. Bread was level 410 when he last checked. Wouldn't it have obviously become higher? I have the dark attribute bonus but Bread can use Beast Spirit Possession to raise his stats.'

Ark had considered Bread a few times. In particular, Ark was interested in Bread's special skill Beast Spirit Possession. In fact, Ark had thought Beast Spirit Possession was better than his dark attribute bonus at first. But he later confirmed that it wasn't a problem. His dark attribute bonus raised all stats by 50% which included useful ones like strength, wisdom or even luck. But Beast Spirit Possession was a skill which selected the stat to be raised. Moreover, the animal spirits could only be stacked 3 times. If he stacked the Beast Spirit Possession then he could raise his abilities by 150%. Furthermore, the animal spirits of Beast Spirit Possession had different characteristics so it was possible to switch

characteristics whenever he wanted. The movement of a dolphin was possible with Beast Spirit Possession or even it can even cause a disease like 'rabies' with the dog Beast Spirit Possession.

'But there is no substitute for my dark attribute bonus. I am level 383. Bread is 41 levels higher than me so there is still level difference. When considering Bread's capabilities, the ratio of victory is 4:6.....'

That was his conclusion when thinking positively. Therefore some preparations were required to win. Ark busily moved his hands as he started the preparations. In this situation, Ark's most reliable skill was Survival Cooking! Ark made various dishes at extravagant speed and ate them.

Secondary Effects Information Window

* Food effects

Tuntun Roast – Strong Chicken Breast Salad- Herb Soup- Fried Shrimps -Lightly Grilled Poco Leg- Slime Marinated Meat- Ratosu Steak- Monkfish Mushroom Soup

Total stats raised by the food effects: Strength +65, Stamina +36, Agility +40, Intelligence +15

* Effects of Tonic currently taking

Sipijeondaebotang (Strength +2, Stamina +2) Time taken: 16 days

'Amazing.'

Ark looked warmly at the information window. In the old days, he couldn't eat that many dishes because of the limit. Now thanks to the Monkfish Mushroom Soup, he could eat up to eight dishes before his satiety was full. Therefore his stats increased by 156! That was like gaining 15 levels.

'Huhuhu, how is it? The level difference has narrowed even more!'

Ark elatedly looked to the other side where Bread was preparing. Then his complexion instantly turned gloomy. Bread was also buffing up in preparation for the battle. The Beast Master was a Druid profession so it had a lot of buffs. But Ark turned gloomy because of Redian. Redian was a magician and it was the profession with the strongest buffs after the priest.

“Sheesh, how annoying. ‘Blade Force’, ‘Immortal Armour’, ‘Elemental Defense.’ Eh..... What else is there?”

Blade Force increased damage. Immortal Armour increased durability and defense of equipment. Elemental Defense increased resistance to magic of various attributes. Etc..... Redian meticulously buffed Bread like a wife preparing his husband’s clothes before he went to work. The preparations for battle were similar.

‘What the? Then isn’t it a standstill even after I ate the food?’

However Ark still had a secret weapon left.

‘I definitely have to use this!’

He finally took the Promised Sword out of his bag. The Promised Sword had higher level restrictions than Gwisal’s sword but the stats and options were worse. But the Promised Sword was an item with 4 sockets! If he inserted Hearthstones in the sockets then the sword would become much stronger than Gwisal’s sword. Currently Ark had three rare Hearthstones which had a strong effort.

‘Damn, I wanted to wait until I found four rare Hearthstones before using this..... It can’t be helped. It will still be stronger than Gwisal’s sword with three Hearthstones inserted.

Ark took out the three rare Hearthstones which flashed. It was the blood red jewel he received from vampire territory, the ‘Vampire Stone.’ The blue sheen came from the Mana Steal Stone. And finally there was the Explosion Stone which seemed like a fire was burning in it.

‘Then shall I begin?’

Ark inserted the stones with a sense of expectation. First the sword trembled violently and turned cold when he added the Vampire Stone. Then a red line was drawn in the centre of the blade. Next he inserted the Mana Steal Stone which caused a blue light to spread. Finally the sword was wrapped in flames when the Explosion Stone was added and the information window appeared.

-Promised Sword (Rare)

Weapon: Two-handed sword

Attack: 40~50 Durability: 200/200

Weight: User restriction: Level 250, Advanced Sword Mastery skill

An ancient sword inscribed with complex magic symbols. The symbols engraved on the sword can't be decrypted using the current knowledge. However, the aura it gives off indicates that there is still an undisclosed hidden secret. There is also a space to fit something between the sword blade and hilt. It seems related to the sword's secret.

<Option: Strength +20, Stamina +10>

-Socket 1: (Vampire Stone) 5% of the damage dealt to an opponent is absorbed as health.

-Socket 2: (Mana Steal Stone) 5% of the damage dealt to an opponent is absorbed as mana.

-Socket 3: (Explosion Stone) There is a 33% chance of dealing 10~100 fire damage and 5~50 splash damage in a 2 metre area.

-Socket 4: (Empty)

All the trouble was worth it after seeing the information window about the set of rare Hearthstones. The real sword damage was unchanged but he could absorb his opponent's health and mana every time he attacked. There was also additional splash fire damage! A truly cheat like option! It was completely different from the appearance of Gwisal's

sword. This sword was embellished with red and blue and it had flames wrapped around it. Now even the visual of the Promised Sword was satisfying.

‘With these options how much would I get for it in the auction?’

It would probably be worth two times the highest price he received so far.

‘That’s it, this is the best thing I can do for now! The only thing left is to use Blade Maintenance to raise attack and Laundry to raise defense.....’

Thus Ark finished his preparations for the fight. Suddenly Buksil and Baekgu came up to him.

“I..... Ark-nim.”

They had recovered from the alcohol they had drunk in New World. If players didn’t drink then they would return to normal after 1 hour. While Buksil looked sober, Baekgu still seemed slightly drunk. Buksil shrunk back and tried to make excuses.

“T-that is..... Before you go.....”

“It’s okay.”

Ark smiled and gave him a pat on the shoulder.

“I realized it this time. You’re always full of complaints. It’s all my fault. I’ve realized it.”

“Huh? T-then....”

Buksil and Baekgu’s face brightened. Then they froze at Ark’s next words.

“Your complaints are evidence that you need some discipline.”

Ark whispered sweetly into both their ears.

“.....You are dead.”

Act 7: Using the Divine Skill

[TL] I’ve been using bayonet as Bread’s weapon since that’s what all the translation sites and dictionaries gave me. However that didn’t really make sense to me especially considering this chapter. So I split up the korean and it translated more into greatsword, so that is what I will be using as his weapon from now it. If you want to have an idea of what it looks like then check out these [google images](#).

Kwang, kwang, kwang!

The noises rang out on the previously quiet mountain ridge. The earth shook like there was an earthquake coming and there was a dense cloud of dust. Then everything suddenly seemed to stop. The deafening roar quieted as the dust storm slowly settled down. The only thing moving quietly was the dust floating in the air. After a while.....!

“Dark Blade!”

The dust was split in half by a sword enveloped in flames. Then the dust exploded and scattered as a greatsword descended from the other direction.

“Earth storm!”

When the greatsword collided with the sword, a storm occurred once again. The form of two people could be seen through the storm. The one holding the flaming sword was Ark. Opposite Ark was the distinctive form of a huge person. The man wearing animal leather was obviously Bread.

“Take this!”

Bread ran up and brandished his greatsword.

Buuuuong!

The dust on the ground was sucked up at a tremendous speed and started twisting. Ark fell down to avoid being hit by the greatsword. He rolled his body to another spot and sprang up before swinging his sword at Bread. However, Bread's reflexes also weren't inferior to Ark's. Bread moved his greatsword to a diagonal angle to deflect the attack before striking downwards.

"Huh?"

It was a really unexpected attack. Ark took a quick breath and stepped back but the greatsword had already grazed his shoulder. He instantly lost 400 health from the attack. Just a graze had seriously wounded him! However he couldn't hesitate in this situation. In the short time Ark had stopped moving, Bread had pushed forward and continuously wielded his greatsword. Ark stumbled and the greatsword barely missed his nose. Bread murmured as the greatsword descended into an empty space.

"Damn, I really thought I would cut you this time."

"Huk, do you think I'm that easy to kill?"

Ark laughed and replied but he was inwardly sweating.

'Damn, he interrupted it and counterattacked? If it had hit correctly then he would've received a critical hit. As expected, he really has troublesome power. Not only are the skills great but he is also familiar in a fight. No, not just a fight.....'

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the attack and observed Bread's movements. Ark had been astonished by Bread's weapon when he first saw it. Bread used a two handed greatsword. It was similar to Ark's Promised Sword but much larger. The greatsword was the largest of the two handed swords. Of course its attack power and durability were among the strongest. When compared to an average long sword, it had

an average of 1.8 times more damage. In addition, it automatically dealt 1.5 additional damage to large monsters. But despite its enormous damage, there were few people who used the greatsword in New World. There were a number of reasons but the largest penalty was that the size and weight meant the attack speed was extremely slow.

‘But this guy.....’

When in close combat, there was no difference between the number of times Ark attacked.

‘How can he attack so quickly when carrying a greatsword? Did he increase attack speed with his other equipment?’

He had thought this at first. But he still wasn’t convinced. After exchanging a few blows, Ark realized that it wasn’t that simple.

‘There is no waste!’

Yes, Bread didn’t waste any of his movements. He avoided the opponent’s attack and then struck back. It was a very simple movement but difficult to do in the middle of battle. Only people accustomed to holding a sword were able to perform such movements. It required being accustomed to the body in order to change movements. Yes, that was the secret to Bread’s attack speed. Bread’s movements were similar to a machine. There was no rush whenever he stabbed. While attacking and defending, he minimized any unnecessary movements and counterattacked. It was some tight movements! Even though he was holding the greatsword, he could match Ark’s movements.

‘He can also utilize his class skills.’

Bread’s profession was a Beast Master. The feature of a Beast Master was to stack up to 3 Beast Spirit Possessions. As soon as the battle started, Bread instantly chose three animal spirits to possess him. He chose the soul of the bear which raised strength by 50% and the cheetah soul which raised agility by 50%. That was only two Beast Spirit Possessions. He had seen Bread use them on the ferry and in Bosaga village. Ark hadn’t understood at the time.....

“Beast Spirit Possession, power of the Bull rise! Dash!”

Ark instantly used Dark Dance as Bread yelled. Then Bread grew horns on his head and shot forward like an arrow. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information window floated in front of him.

-Bread's profession skill: Beast Spirit Possession

* Additional skills of Beast Spirit Possession identified.

[Bull] When possessed by the spirit of the Bull, the breakthrough power increases by 50%.

When attacking an enemy with the 'Dash' skill, movement speed will increase by 100% and attack power by 50%. When Dash is successful, the defense will decrease by 30% and the abnormal state 'fall down' will be induced.

“Huck, another strange skill.....Riposte!”

Ark panicked and hit the horns with Riposte. Riposte was an attack which pushed the enemy back 10 metres. But thanks to the power of the bull, Bread barely moved. Rather, Ark was the one pushed back several metres thanks to the breakthrough power.

“How many spirit animals do you have?”

“A dozen.”

Bread laughed proudly as he touched his horns. The reason why Bread had only used two Beast Spirit Possessions was because of this. Two of them were necessary skills which raised his stats. The remaining spot he could switch between attack or defense as needed. And that strategy was considerably successful in PVP. Especially when combined with other skills. His basic skill 'Rush' increased his movement speed by 50% and his attack speed rose by 25%. When combined with the power of the bull, the Dash effect became twice as powerful. Bread often linked his skills with Beast Spirit Possession. If the user was unable to grasp the skill beforehand then they would suffer.

'If I hadn't used Skill Penetration beforehand then it would've caused a lot of damage.'

Ark would've needed herbal medicine if he had been hit. Luckily he used Skill Penetration to see through it. If he knew the special effects of Bread's Beast Spirit Possessions then Ark could cope with it.

'That Bread, he is definitely strong but.....'

Ark stopped Bread's series of attacks and clenched his sword firmly.

"Is it my turn? Take this. Dark Strike!"

Ark released the charged up aura. The black aura shot like an arrow from his sword. Bread moved his greatsword to block it before swinging his sword vertically downwards towards Ark. It was the accurate timing needed to switch the greatsword from defense to offense! But Ark suddenly braked and the greatsword vainly split through air.

'It is indeed the weakness of the greatsword.'

A small smile spread on Ark's face. It really was amazing that Bread could move the greatsword at such an incredible pace with both hands. However, the disadvantage of the greatsword wasn't just its attack speed. It was possible to grasp the direction of the greatsword's attack with just one look. Of course, estimating the greatsword's trajectory with one look while it was moving so quickly and reacting to it wasn't an easy task. But he had trained for many years so it was possible for him.

'Bread certainly isn't an easy opponent. However the odds are in my favour if it is only this much!'

Ark determined that after 10 minutes of fighting Bread. When comparing capabilities, the two of them were almost equal. Bread used a greatsword as a weapon. Each swing took 500~700 health in one blow. On the other hand, Ark wasn't as powerful but he dealt more hits. Therefore the consumed health was similar. Then the only thing left was stats and level! After calculating it, Bread was superior to him in

stats. But if they compared the remaining health left, Ark had 60% while Bread had 57%. Ark was a little ahead of him. The reason why.....

"This is the real attack!"

Ark noticed a gap and thrust his sword.

"Cancel power of the Bull! Beast Spirit Possession, power of the turtle rise!"

Bread's skin looked like the shell of a turtle after he used Beast Spirit Possession. There was a roaring sound and Bread stumbled. This was the perfect chance to attack the opponent. Ark pressed forward with his sword. As expected, Bread was a user with a lot of fighting experience and he blocked the attack.

But.....pepepepeng! Hwarrrrruk!

An explosion occurred when the two swords touched. Then flames spread over Bread's face and skin.

"This is it, this is it!"

A satisfied smile appeared on Ark's face. The explosion was the effect of the rare Hearthstone, the Explosion Stone. It gave a 33% chance of flame 50-100 damage, and caused an explosion dealing 10~50 splash damage within a 2 metre range! This 33% chance didn't occur when the sword damaged the enemy. The 33% chance occurred when the sword impacted with another weapon. Of course, this wasn't a direct blow so the 50~100 damage didn't apply. However, the 2 metre range of splash damage couldn't be avoided. Even though the damage was 10~50, Redian's Elemental Defense meant only half the damage was applied. But it was still some damage!

Kang, kang kang, pepepepeng! Kang, kang, pepepepeng!

Ark tirelessly swung his sword and caused flames to soar. Bread's health slowly went down. Moreover his sword was left intact despite the flames. Bread's movements while holding the greatsword became

slow. Ark's method of 'pouring continuous attacks like an evening shower' made it difficult to avoid the attacks.

"Damn!"

Bread frowned as he was pushed back by the flames. Then he stepped to Ark's side and swung his greatsword. Rather than being on the defensive, he had been looking for a chance to counterattack. Ark was so engrossed in attacking that he couldn't avoid the greatsword which hit his shoulder. He received a violent impact to the shoulder and lost 700 health.

"Ugh, this bastard.....!"

Ark stumbled and stepped back. However Ark wasn't the only one hit. He had hit Bread's side at the same time that his shoulder was damaged. When his sword hit, fire emerged and a blue and red pattern also flashed.

-The 'Explosion' effect has dealt the enemy additional 73 fire damage.
-The Vampire Stone has absorbed 5% of the 523 damage and 26 of your health has been restored.
-The Mana Steal Stone has absorbed 5% of the 523 damage and 26 of your mana has been restored.

"It really is crazy."

Ark laughed as he saw the effects. This was the true power of Promised Sword. Every time he inflicted damage to the enemy then he would absorb health and mana.

'Unfortunately it isn't as effective in a 1-on-1 fight.....'

In fact, the health and mana absorption would show the best effect when dealing with a large number of monsters. When fighting a lot of monsters, it was normal to deal a lot of damage. This meant he could absorb 5% of the health of all the monsters. If he attacked 10 monsters for a total of 10,000 damage, 5% of that meant he would absorb 500

health. Even if he recovered 500 health at the end of the battle, that just meant he didn't need to waste time recovering his health. In 1-on-1 PVP battles, the effect was cut in half even against a strong opponent like Bread.

'Bread's level and health is quite high. His maximum health probably exceeds 10,000. It might be possible to recover 500 health by the end of this fight.'

Of course, in this fight 500 health would be lost with just one blow from either Ark or Bread. But an extra 500 health couldn't be ignored when it could be the difference between life and death with a strong opponent. Yes, Ark was currently a little bit ahead because of the rare Hearthstones in the Promised Sword.

'If this keeps up then I can win!'

Ark was sure of his victory. Of course, the prerequisites were necessary for Ark to win. In a wide open place, Ark was at disadvantage since his defense and offense were inferior. And preparations were needed to use some of his skills. Some warrior skills needed a certain amount of time or action to be used. Ark indiscriminately attacked without giving Bread time to use those skills. His attacks were to stop Bread's offensive rather than to decrease the health. It wasn't just the splash damage gnawing away at Bread's health.

"Ugh, this bastard..... You're stuck like a leech....."

Bread had noticed Ark's strategy. No matter how much he wanted to maintain a distance, Ark clung to Bread to prevent his attacks. Then he used the 33% chance of explosive damage to shave away at Bread's health. Of course, it wasn't that easy to maintain that state. Bread had a few skills that were difficult to prevent. Just one hit would cause 500~600 damage. The health which Ark took 3~4 minutes to shave away using splash damage was caught up with just one blow. Was it like a war between a needle and an axe? So that situation continued for 30 minutes while Ark and Bread's health remained close to each other. Ark had 55% health left while Bread had 48%! If he concentrated and

maintained this state then it was possible to win against Bread. It was at that time. Bread who had been unable to break through Ark's shower of attacks suddenly jumped forward.

'Heh, he realized he can't win so he is running away. That makes me feel more comfortable.'

Ark swung his sword and laughed as it impacted with Bread's greatsword. Then Bread lost his centre of balance and stumbled. What could he do in this desperate situation? Bread made a huge mistake considering his skills. It was a chance to win!

"Victory after all that patience!"

Ark's feet shot up like the wind. His kick shot out at an incredible speed. A flying kick! If this kick hit then there was a high possibility of causing a rigid state. It would only last for 1~2 seconds but that was a decisive difference in PVP with high level users. Ark would put an end to the duel with this attack. However Ark had a hunch that something was wrong the moment he started the kick.

'How.....?'

It was an attack that couldn't be avoided judging by the timing. Moreover, Ark had never used kicks against Bread so far. It was an attack with unexpected timing and method! However, Bread seemed to know what attack was coming and the timing as he avoided it. At the same time, a light smile appeared on Bread's face.

"Victory after all that patience?"

".....!"

"This is thanks to my preparations! Earth storm!"

Bread swung his greatsword like a golf swing. At the same time there was a massive storm which swirled around Ark's body.

"Now shall I pay you back? Knife Blade Storm!"

Bread's greatsword split into dozens of copies and floated in the air around Ark. It was the devastating combo of Earth storm and Knife Blade Storm which flew him into the air! Ark's health drained out after he was hit by them. Just before he fell to the ground, Bread used the spirit of the Bull again and used Dash. Ark flew many metres and bumped into several obstacles before finally hitting the ground. 30% of Ark's health was lost in an instant. But the situation just puzzled him further. How on earth did Bread perfectly know the timing of Ark's kick?

"Ugh, h-how on earth.....?"

Bread laughed and murmured after he saw Ark's confusion.

"I told you. I made preparations to win. What do you think I did during the last 10 days?"

"What?"

'What he was doing during the last 10 days? What does that have to do with this situation.....? ?'

Ark's forehead suddenly wrinkled.

'T-that damn bastard Buksil.....!'

Ark now understood the situation. Bread was able to perfectly calculate the timing of Ark's kicks because of Buksil. Bread and Buksil had been waiting together for Ark for 10 days. Clearly Bread had watched Buksil's memory crystals. All of Ark's combat scenes were recorded on the memory crystals! Yes, during the last ten days Bread had been learning Ark's attacks, kicks, habits and skills from the memory crystals. However, the Promised Sword was an unexpected item. The reason it was so one-sided in the beginning was because Ark had never used the Promised Sword before so no countermeasures were taken against it. The moment Ark had used his habit of a kick combo, Bread managed to deal him a decisive counterattack. Ark paled as he belatedly realized the situation. Thanks to one moment of carelessness, he had instantly lost 30% health. Now Ark had 25% health left while Bread had

48%! The distance was now huge. Previously Bread had engaged in close combat but now he would stay at a medium range. No, with his health like this then there was no chance even in close combat.

“I’m screwed. Victory or defeat was decided with one combo!”

Ark intuitively sensed his defeat.

‘Is it going to end like this?’

In fact, there was no reason to really worry about victory or defeat in this fight. He wouldn’t receive any experience, items or skill proficiency from it. Anyway, he had just accepted this duel to make Bread give up chasing him.

‘I’d rather not have a user like Bread chasing me.’

But he couldn’t accept his defeat so easily after accepting the duel. It would hurt his pride.

‘However there is already a 4000 health difference.’

Ark felt hopeless as he checked the information window. He had roughly 1,700 health left. If Bread had 10,000 health like Ark guessed, then he should have approximately 5000 health left. If Bread stayed at a medium range and fired his skills then the odds weren’t in Ark’s favour.

‘If only there is a way to reverse the situation.....’

There was the Area Declaration skill of the Dark Soul called Glory of the Night which could increase his attack and stats by 50%! If he used Glory of the Night then the fight might become balanced. However, Bread already knew the way to stop the Area Declaration skill. It was by making Bread’s Area Declaration skill overlap to cancel it. Area Declaration was a skill which couldn’t be used between two users with a 2nd stage profession.

‘.....Is there another way?’

Ark had completely lost his will to fight. Suddenly a brilliant idea came to his head.

‘Wait? The Area Declaration skill invalidates each other. Can’t I take advantage of this weakness? That’s right, wasn’t there that unexpected skill? If I use it.....That’s it! There is a chance if I use that skill! The problem is using it..... Anyway, I don’t have a choice. If I don’t try it then I’ll die.’

“What is it? You’re already giving up?”

At that time Bread muttered as he approached. Ark took out the Fire Stone from his bag and threw it. A column of flame appeared causing Bread to flinch and retreat. Meanwhile Ark escaped using Sprint.

“Ugh, what? Are you running away?”

“You idiot. It is a strategic retreat!”

“I won’t let you retreat. Beast Spirit Possession, spirit of the cheetah!”

Bread used the cheetah spirit to chase after him. But just before he caught up with Ark, something wound around his leg.

“Ugh, what is this?”

“Huhuhu, this Nadingka’s Fruit is the specialty of Seutandal!”

The Nadingka’s Fruit reduces movement speed by 50% for 1 minute! Ark gained some time and blindly used his skills. The skill Ark used at that moment was Entrusted Volumes. When he used Entrusted Volumes, the slot machine appeared.

-You have used the power of Entrusted Volumes.

Results: [Properties] <Brave Skills> [Alignment] <Warrior>
{Environment} <Mountain>

The selected effect is ‘Slightly Brave Warrior.’

<For 3 minutes attack power will increase by +5%>

It was an amazing effect for Entrusted Volumes. But Ark just frowned and shouted!

“No, not this one!”

“Take this!”

Then Bread caught up and swung his greatsword. Ark used Nadingka's Fruit on Bread and once again ran away. This time he hid behind a rock and waited for Entrusted Volumes to end before using it again. However, this skill couldn't be used for an unlimited amount of time. It consumed 500 health each time he used it.

‘I've already failed twice so I only have 700 health left. But if I use the Power of Resurrection from the Mantle with a Strange Power than I have 1700 left. I can use the power of Entrusted Volumes three more times!’

Ark was about to recover his health using Power of Resurrection when he hesitated.

‘Wait? The effect of Entrusted Volumes is not completely random. The effect that appeared depended on the situation. The last time the effect appeared was when my health was less than 10%. Then?’

After considering it again, Ark used Entrusted Volumes when he only had 700 health left. After praying desperately, the information window he wanted to see appeared.

-You have used the power of Entrusted Volumes.

Results: [Properties] <Pretence> [Alignment] <Swindler> [Environment] <Rock Forest>

The effect chosen is that of a swindler.

<The ‘Swindler’ effect is applied to all skills for 3 minutes>

“T-that’s it. It came. My guess was correct. The effect of Entrusted Volumes is not completely random.

If I grasp the situation in advance then there is a 50% chance the effect I select will appear!”

Ark discovered a new fact about Entrusted Volumes. But he didn’t have time to study it now. At that moment he heard Bread’s voice from behind him.

“Bastard, disappointing me this way.....!”

Bread had become angry because Ark kept on running away. Then Ark turned his body and shouted.

“Area Declaration. Glory of the Night!”

“What? You used Area Declaration? You fool, haven’t I already told you that it is ineffective against me? Area Declaration, Land of the Beast!”

Bread’s Area Declaration spread over the same area as Ark’s Glory of the Night. Normally the two territories would collide and disappear. But strangely this time the two territories overlapped and remained?

“Eh? What’s going on?”

Bread seemed bewildered but a look of glee spread over Ark’s face.

“That’s it, Bread successfully used Land of the Beast!”

But that was only 50% of his plan. The important part was from now on. Ark used Nadingka’s Fruit to run from Bread before calling to Racard.

‘Racard, use satellite surveillance mode to find a hollow place that can’t be easily escaped!’

‘What? What are you saying out of nowhere?’

‘Just do it!’

In fact, both Redian and Ark's summons couldn't be used in this duel. But Bread didn't know that Ark could use remote communication with his pet. While Racard couldn't directly participate in the battle, he could still be used for reconnaissance. So Bread never suspected that Racard was helping with the duel.

"You idiot, why did you use Area Declaration?"

Bread yelled while searching for him. But Ark didn't respond to the provocation.

'Heh, you'll soon see!'

Ark hid like a snake in the grass or behind rocks while using Nadingka's Fruit. After a while. The 'Swindler's effect' had disappeared when he heard Racard's voice.

'Master, I found it. If you climb up the hill on the opposite side then there is a pit underneath it. The depth is approximately 10 metres and the width 20 metres. Is that okay?'

'Okay, that's it!'

Ark immediately went up the hill Racard mentioned. Just like Racard described, there was a pretty deep pit at the bottom.

'I'll fight to win in this place!'

"I found you!"

Bread had discovered Ark and ran up the hill after him. Ark pretended to run away to escape and used his skill.

"Summon Ghost Knight Corps!"

When Ark used the skill, the space split open and the ghost soldiers appeared.

-Oberium Knights. Our saviour has called. Where is the enemy?

"The target is bread!"

Ark shouted and pointed to Bread. Then the leader of the ghost knights pointed to Bread and shouted.

-Over there, defeat the enemy threatening our saviour!

-For the glory of Oberium! Ohhhhhh!

The 30 ghost soldiers rushed like a storm towards Bread.

"Huh, what is this? Beast Spirit Possession, defense of the turtle!"

Bread swiftly used the shell of the turtle to defend against the ghost knights. As expected from a beginner level skill, the ghost knights hardly dealt any damage to the user over level 400. However, Ark's purpose wasn't to injure Bread but to drive him down into the pit. Then Bread was right on the edge!

"Jump!"

Ark charged towards Bread.

"Huk! What, what the? Kuak!"

Before Bread could use his greatsword, Ark grabbed his body and drove them both into the pit.

".....Do you intend for us to die together? Not a chance. Power of the Cat!"

Bread used the spirit of the cat to land inside the pit. Ark also avoided the fall damage as he landed on the ground. Bread couldn't understand the situation and just looked around the pit before snorting.

"You fool, this is what you came up with? Dropping me into a pit? But making me fall is meaningless. Anyway, it worked out well. Since you can't run away anymore. Now it is time to finish this. Just give up and die bravely!"

Bread ran forward with his greatsword.

“Area Declaration skill, Glory of the Night!”

When Ark used Glory of the Night, a black form appeared in front of him. It was the dark spirits! When the dark spirits appeared, the area surrounding him turned pitch black.

Kikikikiki.

The eyes of the dark spirit flashed and a black aura surrounded Ark. The black aura swirled around his body and sword like fog.

-You have used the Area Declaration skill Glory of the Night.

* There is a 50% increase in attack power within a 100 metre area.

* There is a 50% increase in defense within a 100 metre area.

* There is a 20% increase in magic resistance within a 100 metre area.

Bread became startled.

“What.... The cool down time of Area Declaration is 24 hours.....”

“I’m sorry but I haven’t used the Area Declaration skill yet.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin. That was the reason why Ark used Entrusted Volumes to try and get the ‘Swindler’ effect. The Swindler effect applied to all his skills. It meant..... When the effect was applied, it made it seem like the skill had been used. In other words, the skill seemed to be triggered. Yes, Ark just pretended to use Glory of the Night. But Bread had actually used Land of the Beast. It was used up for the day. That was the reason why the Area Declaration skill didn’t disappear when it seemed to overlap.

‘And there is the second weakness of the Area Declaration skill!’

It was no use if the enemy escaped outside the territory. That was why Ark grabbed Bread and threw him into the pit. The width of the pit was

20 metres. The range of Glory of the Night was 100 metres so there was no way to escape it!

“What on earth is going on?”

Bread didn’t know this so of course he was puzzled. But he just lifted his greatsword and clenched his teeth together.

“I don’t know what your plan is but Area Declaration does not make you invincible. It just raises your stats a bit. But I have 4000 more health than you! You can’t withstand it even with Area Declaration!”

Currently Ark only had 200 health remaining because he used Entrusted Volumes. Meanwhile Bread still had approximately 5000 health left. Even with the strong buffs applied, the odds weren’t in his favour. However, Ark was still composed.

“Is it really like that? Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, hwarrrrruk!

Ark then used a skill. The ground abruptly split open and a ball of fire rose up. The flame ascended dozens of metres before forming a scale of the Fire Draconians! It rose to a great height before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark. His Area Declaration skill consumed 2000 mana and 400 Spiritual Power. Then the Divine Skill consumed an additional 1000 mana and 400 Spiritual Power. If he hadn’t hunted the wendigoes and Soul Eater than he would’ve never been able to use the two skills at the same time! But the effects were absolute once triggered.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

* 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

* Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

50% of his health was restored and various stats were increased. When the information window appeared, flames also wrapped around Ark's body. It was like an armour of fire and he could feel the sense of vitality welling up inside him. It really felt like a Divine Skill.

"W-what is that? Perhaps.....?"

Bread's mouth gaped open as he simultaneously received 1000 damage. Ark moved a finger covered in fire and laughed before explaining. Flames even emerged from his mouth every time he talked.

"Have you heard of Divine Skills?"

"D-divine skill!"

All the blood drained from Bread's face. Then he hurriedly turned around and jumped onto a nearby rock. A Divine skill had been activated in that territory. He wouldn't feel comfortable even with his health at 100%. Bread instantly judged that and used the power of the Cheetah to try to escape by jumping on the rocks.

"A wise choice but..... It's too late!"

Kwang!

The ground rumbled as Ark jumped 10 metres. Then he grabbed Bread's collar who had jumped too late and dragged him back down. The pit then shook as a flame pillar spouted him dozens of metres.

“Kuaaaak!”

When Bread hit the ground, he lost 1,200 health instantly. It was the extreme power of the Divine Skill!

“Now, take this. This is my strongest attack!”

Ark jumped up and brought his sword down vertically. The sword penetrated Bread’s chest and swirled with flames.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A flame tornado rose into the sky. It’s shape.....was definitely a Fire Draconian. Then a message window rose among the flames.

-You have won the honour duel.

<Fame +500>

“Kuahahaha!”

Powerful laughter rang out through the mountain. Redian looked at the charred and burnt Bread with scathing eyes.

“Why are you causing such an uproar when you were beaten?”

Redian seemed sour about the duel result. However, Bread just looked at Redian with eyes that indicated she couldn’t understand.

“Women won’t understand. Victory or defeat isn’t important to a man.”

“Are you an idiot? Naturally it is better to win.”

“Ahh, it really doesn’t matter. I’m satisfied now.”

“What about me? My grudge?”

“Well, that isn’t possible anymore.”

Bread poked his finger into his ear and looked at the distant mountains. His attitude was like a husband pretending ignorance while his wife scolded him.

‘Yes it’s not possible.....’

Ark looked at Bread strangely. Honestly, he had been worried about Bread until now. It was a honour duel against Bread..... Even if he won, there was no guarantee that he would stop pursuing Ark. Bread wanted to win so much he studied Ark through the memory crystals for 10 days.....

‘He pursued his target for so many times so there is no guarantee he will be satisfied with this kind of result.’

Bread was level 410. Ark was anxious that Bread would continue to fight even after the Ark won the duel. Bread had chased him all the way to Hwaryong Mountain for a reason he didn’t know. But he was defeated in vain. He thought Bread would think up an excuse or Redian would interfere. But Bread really hadn’t been lying about the grudge being settled with the duel. The result was good despite the trivial issues.

‘It is hard to understand but it is fortunate.’

Ark felt relief in his chest at Bread’s response. Anyway, Ark was quite satisfied with their duel. However, he didn’t want to fight Bread again. It was doubtful that he would win if they fought again.

“Then what’s going to happen now?”

“Well, we won’t bother you anymore. Isn’t that right?”

Bread looked at Redian who replied in a sulky voice.

“Got it, I understand! I’m tired now.”

“Indeed.”

Bread smiled and said. Ark nodded before he suddenly remembered something.

“But I was wondering something. Why have you been chasing me? I don’t remember every seeing you guys.”

“Well, that is.....”

Bread blushed and scratched his head. Ark’s mouth dropped open at Bread’s ensuing description. Ark had thought there was so large grudge since they pursued him so persistently. But the actual reason was ridiculous. The tourists flocked to the dungeon that Bread and Redian were capturing when Seutandal rose. A tourist made a mistake and touched something so they were locked out of the dungeon. So they decided to get revenge on Ark who had caused Seutandal to rise?

“W-what is that? Aren’t I totally innocent?”

“I understand how you feel but..... Well, it is just a game. Hahahahaha! Well, it is just a game but the minor problem is solved so it doesn’t matter anymore.”

‘Isn’t that ridiculous?’

Ark’s throat swelled up at the thought. But like Bread said, the problem was now resolved amicably. Even if he felt irritated towards Bread and Redian, he held it inside him.

‘It is unfair but there is no point stressing about it.’

Then Ark noticed Buksil and Baekgu in a corner and glared at them. While all the problems were settled and he even received an extra 500 fame, he still had to deal with Buksil and Baekgu. Buksil had tried to swindle 800 gold from him when Baekgu was still alive. Ark was also going to make him pay for whining the whole way to Hwaryong Mountain. He even leaked the memory crystal which pressed Ark into a corner.....plus he drank alcohol. Death penalty confirmed!

Baekgu’s crime was guiding Bread and Redian to Hwaryong Mountain. And he called Ark a coward, making him unable to refuse Bread’s challenge.....plus he drank alcohol. Death penalty confirmed!

He wouldn't go easy on Buksil anymore. When Baekgu supposedly died, he had worried that Buksil would give up the game. However Baekgu had been returned. Now Ark didn't have to worry about Buksil quitting the game anymore. But he couldn't educate Buksil and Baekgu right now. After the duel ended, he knew that Baekgu had a huge influence on Bread. When casually talking to Bread, he mentioned the Wolrang clan and realized the reason why Bread had changed his mind about Ark. Anybody who liked dogs couldn't be a bad person. Thanks to that bias, he came to the conclusion that Ark was a good person.

'Isn't he a fool?'

Ark thought it was ridiculous but anyway, Bread was a person who loved dogs. How could he enforce the death penalty on Baekgu in front of Bread?

'It will have to wait until we separate from Bread.'

Ark thought about what he would do to the two of them after separating from Bread. The two pieces of cattle instinctively sensed Ark's thoughts and trembled in the corner. Then Bread clicked his tongue and murmured.

"By the way, it seems a little strange to separate now. There are a number of things I still want to talk to you about. Let's create some friendly ties for when we meet in the future. I'll treat you so let's go together. I'd like to talk about the duel again. There's a good city that is like my hometown not far from here."

"No, I...."

There were various reasons why Ark wanted to part from Bread quickly. Just as he was about to refuse, there was a sudden flash from the corner. It was Buksil who had been waiting in the corner for the death penalty. Buksil's eyes brightened and he ran to Bread before grasping his hand tightly.

"Yes, Hyung-nim. I also don't want to part from Hyung-nim! Naturally men should drink together after a cool fight. Ark-nim?"

‘That bastard.....!’

Ark glared at Buksil through narrowed eyes. Thus Buksil’s life was extended a little bit thanks to Bread and Redian. Ark couldn’t refuse anymore thanks to Buksil. Come to think of it, it might be better to annoy Buksil and Baekgu for a bit.

‘Huhuhuhuhu, stupid fools, you dug your own grave. Just wait.’

Ark inwardly smiled wickedly before nodding.

“I understand. Let’s have a drink in the village.”

“Good. We communicate well. Hahahaha, let’s go!”

Bread laughed powerfully and led the way.

Act 8: Finding the Lost Dream of a Jackpot!

“Seeking a party!”

“Only available at night, vacancies available for ‘Chamber of Horrors!’”

“Looking for priest and warrior to capture the Slaughter Gardens!”

“Looking for a fellow buddy to hunt continuously for 24 hours on the weekend!”

“Receiving applications for an attack group to raid Necromancer’s Tower. Profit distribution is thorough. Users should be at least level 270, have 30 potions and at least 3 rare equipment.”

Users were gathered like a swarm of cockroaches. The city Bread guided them to was 3~4 hours away from Hwaryong Mountain and called Paradon. Ark’s mouth widened at the sight of users gathered in front of the gate and Bread explained.

"This city is the closest one to King's Grave."

"King's Grave?"

"Eh? You don't know? It is a very famous hunting ground."

The King's Grave were ancient ruins not far from Hwaryong Mountain. It was a quite widespread area and a suitable hunting ground for users level 200~300. So users always formed a party at Paradon and headed to the King's Grave after equipment inspection. The party always returned with a lot of profit so the place swarmed with users.

"Once I was almost living in that place."

Bread looked around with a nostalgic expression.

"Ah, Bread hyung-nim!"

"Redian noonim is also here!"

Hundreds of eyes concentrated on the pair after someone spoke. Then Ark and Bread's group were swarmed by the cockroaches.

"It has been a really long time!"

"Hyung-nim, do you remember me? The magician who previously hunted with you."

"I managed to beat 'Naked Fist' thanks to Hyung-nim. We managed to clear the area because you were our party leader."

"Are you forming a raid party? I'll come whenever you call."

The users started talking from all directions that it reached a point where he couldn't understand anything. In fact, Bread was a legendary user in Paradon. The first time he was the leader of a party and entered King's Grave, he managed to defeat the boss 'who scattered despair' after a fierce battle! He also set the record for clearing all the areas in King's Grave solo in the shortest amount of time. And Redian also had a similar amount of popularity. Bread and Redian were the strongest pair

in Bristania. When he heard this, he thought it was lucky that he didn't receive more damage.

'I was chased after by those two.....it's fortunate that this is over.'

Then Buksil looked over and said.

"Wow, Hyung-nim is a very famous person."

"Huhuhu. Well, it is normal. I've helped half of the people here."

Bread hummed and gobbled up the attention before Redian interjected.

"Stop playing around. You were beaten to death by Ark just now....."

"Beat to death? I was winning a few times....."

Bread muttered with a dissatisfied expression.

"What? Bread hyung-nim was defeated in a duel?"

"What person managed to fight against Bread hyung-nim in a 1-on-1 fight and win?"

"Is that true?"

"Ah, that's right. I lost. It is this guy."

Bread indicated towards Ark and instantly hundreds of eyes concentrated on him. At the same time, Bread and Ark were flooded with a huge amount of questions.

"Is it that person Bread hyung-nim?"

"What level are you?"

"What equipment do you have? What profession?"

"Have you joined a guild yet? Why don't you join our guild? You'll get VIP treatment!"

Ark started feeling dizzy from the surge of questions. He had no idea how to respond to all the interest in him.

“Ya, why don’t you calm down? Everybody stop right now and disappear!”

At that moment, Redian frowned towards the crowd and shouted. Then both her hands caught fire as she glared at the users.

“Who dared pushed me? Don’t you know how uncomfortable I feel? If you don’t want to die than just go, yes?”

Redian threatened the users who retreated. Then Bread went forward and saved the users.

“Now, now! Stop. We have other business.”

‘Phew, I survived.’

Ark was amazed by Redian’s rough attitude but he managed to escape from the siege thanks to her. They left the players and entered Paradon where Bread sighed and muttered.

“Hey, can’t you control your temper?”

“Bah, what am I? Can’t I express it if I don’t feel good?”

The atmosphere around Redian and Bread was getting a bit temperamental.

“What’s not to like? Eh?Is it that time of the month?”

“Do you want to die?”

.....Redian said but her fist had already struck Bread’s jaw. Bread staggered before he suddenly smiled and spoke to Ark.

“Ah that reminds me, don’t you have a lot of things to put in order after hunting so much?”

“Eh? No....that....”

What the hell? Why did the topic change so fast? Where was the reaction to being hit? He just got over it? However Bread just ignored Ark's strange look and pointed to the clock tower.

“There are plenty of things for Redian and I to do in the town. We should split up and gather again at 5 o'clock. The place will be 'Camel's Oasis.' If you ask anybody in the central square then they will tell you. The alcohol at Camel's Oasis is really delicious. If you taste it once then you would want to live there. So see you later!”

Bread was turning around when Buksil shouted with shock.

“Huck, Hyung-nim! You're just going?”

“Huh? What? I'll see you soon.”

“T-that.....let me go with you!”

“Eh? Why?”

Bread asked in an expressionless tone.

“You have me japtem. Of course we have to go together to organize it. Isn't that right?”

Ark stared at Buksil as he spoke. Bread was unable to sense the subtle atmosphere and just laughed.

“I don't understand exactly but you can't come with me. I am going to spend some 'adult time' with Redian.”

“Do you want me to hit you again?”

“Huhuhu, relax..... Anyway, let's meet at 5. At the Camel's Oasis.”

Bread dragged Redian into an alley. After Bread and Redian disappeared, Buksil looked around with worried eyes. Then blood drained from his face as he saw Ark's wickedly gleaming eyes.

“That.....that.....Ark-nim?”

“Huh? What?”

Ark murmured as his lips slowly curved upwards.

“Ah that reminds me, how was your week? But let’s not talk here. If you want to settle the problem between us then it should be when no one under the age of 18 is around. So let’s forget it for now. We’ll drink a cup of alcohol happily after finishing our business. Well, someday that problem will absolutely be settled. Come, let’s go!”

Ark just licked his lips and circled around Buksil and Baekgu. Ark had already devised a method to punish Buksil and Baekgu. It would relieve his stress instantly.

‘He intends to hide behind Bread? Let’s see how long he can hold up. I’ll make him tell me to kill him with his own mouth.’

In fact, Ark’s purpose was more than killing him. Ark had a contract to pay Buksil 800 gold for the memory crystal! At the time it was urgent but now the situation was resolved. And the reason Buksil needed the 800 gold had come back alive. There was no reason to give him 800 gold. But Buksil wouldn’t invalidate the contract obediently. Although he wouldn’t destroy it now, let’s see how long he can last. So Ark would create a horrifying atmosphere over Buksil and Baekgu that would make him want to get rid of the contract. Therefore Ark just stared at them before heading towards the shops. If the one sleeping stretched his foot than the one he hit wouldn’t be able to sleep. He intended to make it so that Buksil couldn’t sleep at all. Buksil and Baekgu jumped every time Ark looked at them so they were haggard by the time Ark entered the store.

‘Huhuhu, this is kind of fun?’

Ark’s newly developed method of torture had another effect.

“Hmm that’s quite a lot, so how about 180 gold?”

The shop keeper looked at the pile of japtem and made an offer. It had been a fortnight since Bosaga so he had a large pile of japtem from hunting. Of course, he excluded all the magic items or items with vague descriptions from the japtem. The goods sold to stores were only japtem. 180 gold was a decent price for a fortnight's worth of collecting. But Buksil shook his head and said.

"What do you mean? Take a look at this! It should be 30 silver for one piece of this. And this too. Do you think this is our first trip? In addition, there is supposed to be an advantage when trading with goods of this magnitude. 185 gold!"

"Hah, but there is a decline in the market price these days. If I buy it and the market slumps then what will I do?"

"That is the risk you take when operating a store. 184 gold!"

The merchant's 'Bargain' skill to convince NPCs would have different effects depending on the enthusiasm. But normally Buksil didn't care about the price received. No matter the price, his transaction skill would still increase. In addition, he wouldn't get a penny of it even if the 'Bargain' skill raised the price offer. However this time his eyes were filled with a desire to get even 1 more silver and he rampaged using 'Bargain.' Before that 'destined' time came, he wanted to get into Ark's good books a bit more.

'Hah, this is.....'

The shop keeper made an awkward expression as Buksil continuously used Bargain. Ark left the bargaining to Buksil and started looking at the shelves.

"Ah, do you like this doll perhaps?"

"Huh?"

"Then let's do this. 180 gold and I'll include that doll."

The shop keeper said when he saw Ark looking at the doll on the shelf. It was a doll shaped like a rabbit.

-Poco Poco Doll (General)

A deluxe doll which resembles the famous Poco Poco of the northern mountains. The texture of the Poco Poco feels very wonderful. In addition, there is a magic equipment inside which will allow the Poco Poco to make sounds and move. It also contains a crystal to record your voice. It is best given as a gift.

<Price: 3 gold>

"Hmm....."

Ark scratched his head for a moment before nodding.

"Okay. I accept."

"Okay, it is a deal."

So Ark received the Poco Poco doll and exited the store.

'It went well. My heart was feeling slightly uncomfortable.....'

In fact, the reason Ark wanted the doll was for Roco. Ark had discovered that it was Roco's birthday the other day. Although he gave her a salary for looking after Ark's Comprehensive Store, he still hadn't given her a birthday present. He had been worried for a while but he finally found a suitable doll.

'I got it as a bonus but it is still like I bought it.'

"Do you like dolls? Hehehe."

After exiting the store, Buksil twisted both hands and approached. It was said in a condescending tone. But Ark didn't pay him any attention and just put it in his bag.

"Now, the next thing to handle....."

It was the Skin of a Greater Demon he obtained from the Soul Eater. It was a rare material obtained from a boss monster.

“Hmm, this is the first time I’ve seen this type of item. Some type of magic seems to dwell inside it.....I’ll have to ask the profession artisans more about it. Well it seems like a rare item so I can give you 20 gold for one piece.”

That was the shop keeper’s reaction when he had shown it to him. 20 gold per piece. 5 pieces was 100 gold. It wasn’t a bad price for a material item. However Ark rejected the deal. The shop keeper wasn’t an expert in this type of item. In such cases, the prices often wouldn’t be fair. In other words, if he visited an NPC with more specialized knowledge then he could receive a higher price.

‘But it is a rare item but it might not be easy to find a specific NPC for it.’

Even if he searched several cities for the NPC, it might not be possible if it was a unique item. It was a waste of time to sell the material item to the NPC.

‘There is only one way left.....’

The method was selling directly to the user. It was an obvious statement but in New World, the trading price with an NPC was just a reference. Depending on how many users needed the item, the price could vary infinitely. A typical example was an item called ‘Black Crystal.’ When selling the Black Crystal to NPCs, they would only give 10 silver. But the need for Black Crystals among alchemists increased so these days it would go for 1 gold if traded between players.

‘So selling unusual or rare materials to NPCs is detrimental.’

First he should collect information about the market price of Skin of a Greater Demon among users. And the quickest way to check that was through the auction room. The auction room was a place where unique japtem and items could be sold and the market price determined. Therefore Ark also dropped by the auction house whenever

he visited a city. And users headed towards King's Grave often visited the auction house in Paradon.

"Isn't this huge?"

The auction house in Paradon was a huge 5 storey building. There were so many items from King's Grave sold that the auction house had grown. The five floors of the auction house were split up by the type of items sold. Ark entered the auction house and asked the manager NPC.

"Where is the place to deal with special ingredients?"

"Go to the D section on the 4th floor."

"Thank you very much."

"Good luck shopping."

Ark went up to the 4th floor and looked at the showcases.

"Let's see..... Skin of a Greater Demon. Skin of a Greater Demon....."

Moon Dust, Cro-Magnon's Eyeballs, Brilliantly Coloured Claw of the Murania. Strange and special ingredients were scattered everywhere in the showcases. The area had relatively high level users gathered so the items stood out. The best ingredients cost several hundred gold. There were even some cases where one ore cost dozens of gold. Some ingredients which were required to create rare and unique ingredients also traded for a high price. And materials not available at stores would sell for three or four times more at the auction.

"Here. I'm glad someone else put it up for auction. Heok!"

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the flyer of information placed on the showcase.

-Skin of a Greater Demon

* Registrant: Invincible Sword King

* Present Selling Price: 108 gold

* Instant Purchase Price: 120 gold.

<Registrant's Explanation of Goods: Rare material for creating armour in the 'Dark Soul' series. Please buy>

'What, what the? 120 gold for one piece?'

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. That was 100 gold more than the price the shop keeper offered. But the price was unmistakeable once he saw the item explanation. He had seen the rare 'robe of a Dark Soul' and 'shoes of a Dark Soul' in the auction room. It currently cost 800~900 gold because it was a popular piece of equipment among magicians which had an option to increase casting speed.

'If I sell the Skin of the Greater Demon' than I can get at less 600 gold!'

That was equal to the price of a rare equipment.

'But I don't have to put it down for auction right now.'

Ark was satisfied after checking the price. If he sold it at the auction house then he would have to pay the 2% handling fee. 2% of 600 gold was 12 gold, which wasn't a small amount of money. Then it was better to find someone who needed Skin of a Greater Demon and trade it directly to them. Even if he gave a 5 gold discount, it was still a profit of 7 gold. Bristania had a lot of magicians so they would require that equipment.

'It won't be too late even if I go to a different place.'

Ark smiled with a pleased expression and turned around. He was looking for information on 'Fire Draconian Skull' when a familiar item caught his eye.

"Eh? What? Is that.....?"

Ark suddenly stopped and looked at the showcase with surprised eyes. A black lump was placed in the showcase.

“Is that really.....?”

Ark hurriedly read the information notice below the item.

-Necromancer's Essence C rank

* Registrant: Area

* Present Selling Price: 10 Gold (No auction participants)

* Immediate Purchase Price: 15 Gold

<Registrant's Explanation of Goods: I don't know, I don't know. More investigation needed>

‘N-Necromancer's Essence!’

Ark inwardly screamed. Necromancer's Essence! That's right. It was the core ingredient required for the Necromancer's Immortality Pill! However, the ingredient was placed on where side of the auction room gathering dust. And the instant purchase price was 15 gold! It wasn't just one. The showcase had at least 20 essences!

“Such a thing.....!”

Ark hurriedly called to a nearby NPC and asked.

“Excuse me.....can you tell me a little bit about this ingredient?”

Then the NPC replied with a slightly perplexed expression.

“Let's see? In fact we have almost no information about this stuff. Do you know the area King's Grave located to the north of Paradon?”

“I don't know that much about it.....”

“Ah, then I’ll explain a bit. Actually, the King’s Grave was said to be inhabited by an Undead King. Since the entrance was sealed, there was an explosive increase in undead until it was opened to foreigners. So these auction items are sometimes found from the Necromancers infesting Necromancer’s Tower in the area.”

“But these prices.....?”

“Oh, are they slightly expensive?”

The guide laughed before speaking.

“The numbers which appeared are too little. The auction room currently has 20 of them but they actually don’t appear that often. They’ve been registered for several days but it’s not popular so it hasn’t sold. At first various magicians and alchemists were interested and studied it but they haven’t found a purpose for it yet. They expected something at first so it sold for 100 gold a piece but the price has gradually started to go down and now people just put it on the auction for 10 gold.”

“These things have been registered for several days?”

Ark’s mouth gaped open. Anyway, Ark was able to understand the general principles thanks to the guide’s explanation. According to the guide, one Necromancer appeared on random floors of the Necromancer’s Tower every few days. So it was a type of special monster. While the Necromancer’s Essence was a rare item, it dropped quite a lot for users at the Necromancer’s Tower. So the Necromancer’s Essence sometimes appeared when the Necromancers were killed. Of course users would be interested in the rare item dropped by the Necromancer. But they didn’t know the purpose of the essences. Yes, the essence was an essential item in Survival Cooking to create the immortality pills! Although Ark wasn’t the only one who learnt Survival Cooking in New World, there weren’t that many of them. It was impossible for people to know how to use the Necromancer’s Essence. In fact, Ark only figured out how to use the essence by accident.

‘Although it is C rank.....’

The Necromancer's Essences that appeared in auction room were only C rank. The Necromancer's Essence that Ark used as A rank. The same type of essences had different ranks depending on the level and abilities of the monster that dropped it. However, it was still an essence even if it was C rank. Although it wasn't A rank, it would still give a special skill.

'Such an item is being sold for 10~15 gold?'

Ark's thoughts started furiously spinning in his head. There was a hunting ground infested with Necromancers! Furthermore, there were a lot of users in front of Paradon heading towards that place. In other words, the Necromancer's Essence would continue to appear. If users were unable to figure out the purpose than the price would continue to fall.

'Doesn't that mean I can continuously creating immortality pills?'

Even with a C rank immortality pill, the abilities would increase around the same amount as the Mongoose' Immortality Pill. However, the item permanently increased stats. Presently only expert alchemists could create 'Elixirs' like that. The Elixirs raised one type of stat by +10 but it cost 300 gold! Also, the elixirs could only be used 5 times per user.

'Based on the Mongoose's Immortality Pill, the C rank pill should increase stats by 15~20 points. It might also increase the resistance to certain attribute and stats depending on the percentage of completion. The Elixirs can't even be compared.'

Since there were a lot of magicians in Bristania, a lot of them would want to purchase it. Once created he could get a minimum of 800.....no, it will be possible to receive 1000 gold! The problem was the remaining ingredients needed.

'The Necromancer's Immortality Pill requires at least 4000 of the skin and heart of the dead to create one.'

But Ark was level 380 so he was already beyond the level 200~300 King's Grave. That meant Ark couldn't obtain the ingredients. He had no choice but to buy it. Even if the essence was cheap, it the remaining

ingredients were expensive then it wouldn't fit in his calculations. But there was no need to worry about it.

'Ohhh. The skin and heart of the dead is only 10 silver?'

A lot of users from Paradon hunted the undead in King's Grave. Therefore ingredients dropped by the dead were overflowing. Since there was an oversupply of skin and heart of the dead, the price was low. Ark's heart became excited as he confirmed it.

'Let's calm down and make some calculations.'

Ark quickly visualized the calculator in his head. The skin and heart of the dead were 10 silver per piece. In order to make the immortality pill, he needed 4000 of them which was 400 gold. If he bought the Necromancer's Essence then the cost would be 410 gold.

'If the final goods are sold for 1000 gold.....?'

That was a profit of 590 gold for one!

'The problem is creating the Necromancer's Immortality Pill. A C rank will still take 2 days.'

But there was also no need to worry about that. The Easter Nation sold [Vision] scrolls! If he added the recipe for Necromancer's Essence to the [Vision] scroll than anyone could create it.

'Then I can create my Immortality Pill factory which I gave up on again!'

Previously Ark had a plan to distribute the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' But the rehabilitation group only obtain 6 essences after labouring in the underground labyrinth for several months. In addition, the main ingredient the Unicorn Horn was too difficult to obtain so he abandoned that plan. Ark was forced to close the factory's doors. But this time the situation was different. Thanks to the users congregating in King's Grave, there was a reliable and cheap supply of ingredients.

'It is a bonanza. This is a huge profit! I can earn money without doing anything!'

Ark smiled and looked at Buksil.

'This method will be simple.'

"Buksil, from today on you will be the manager of the Paradon branch of Ark's store!"

"Huh? Branch manager?"

Buksil blinked his eyes with confusion. Ark explained the business outline and added.

"For the time being, you will stay here and purchase the Necromancer's Essence, the Skin of the Dead and the Heart of the Dead. But be careful when buying it. If users think it is popular than they might raise the price. Do you understand?"

In fact that was Ark's only worry. The price was determined by supply and demand. If someone bought all of the ingredients in the auction room than the users would raise the price. If it went up by 1 silver then the price would continue to rise. The rising costs would soon cause a decrease in profit. Therefore the items had to be quietly bought. It was important not to be noticed. Ark didn't intend to have his Necromancer's Pill become a short term business. With the ingredients supplied at the low price, he would receive a jackpot if he sold it 1-on-1 with another user. With such a grand ambition, he had to pay attention to the stabilization of the ingredients cost. So he needed someone here to monitor the market closely and adjust the purchases according to need. Ark would leave that role to Buksil. Buksil's face lightened after he heard the explanation.

"I-I'll do it! Please leave it to me!"

Buksil was a merchant so he could also calculate quickly. He was convinced about the business. He could also get away from Ark's threats if he became the Paradon branch manager. Of course, Ark had been

irritated with Buksil. There was no reason to pay attention to such things when there was a windfall of money.

“One thing, if you stay then there will be a problem with the videos.....”

“You don’t have to worry about that!”

Buksil quickly interjected.

“Actually, when Ark-nim was on Hwaryong Mountain than my ‘Vampire’s Eye’ reached intermediate level. Even if I’m far away from Ark-nim, I can still record videos with that skill. Communication isn’t available yet but it’ll probably work once the skill reaches advanced level.”

“Ohhh, then there is no problem. Then you’ll sometimes get in contact?”

Ark’s new business plan was rapidly processed. For the moment Buksil was to collect the ingredients. After he purchased the required quantities and sent them to Ark, Ark would place the Necromancer’s Immortality Pill recipe on the [Vision] scroll! He would scrape in money. Buksil would also get 10% of the proceeds. If the profit for the immortality pill was 490 gold, 10% of that would be 49 gold. The only thing Ark had to do was place the recipe on the [Vision] scroll. Even if 10% of the profit was given to Buksil, it was worth it since the ingredients needed to be purchased.

‘When this works.....’

It would be a money cushion! It would be possible to earn several thousand gold from this. With that much profit, Buksil could also earn some gold.

‘Hehehe. Thank you. Chairman-nim, I will follow Ark-nim for the rest of my life.”

“Yes. Work hard. Paradon branch manager. Until the day everybody earns gold in Bristania.”

"I look forward to it. Baekgu, I'll be able to feed you a meat dish every day."

"Wah, really?"

While following Ark and Buksil, Baekgu could only eat kimchi soup. So the contract was signed and it was soon 5 o'clock.

"What? What happened to your expression?"

Bread asked as soon as they arrived at Camel's Oasis. Ark and Buksil's expressions were completely different from when they split up. Money made a person happy. It was a normal phenomenon. But the plan was top secret so Ark coughed and spoke with a straight face.

"What do you mean? Don't you also look completely different?"

Ark asked after seeing Redian. Before they separated, Redian's expression was 'cloudy with a slight typhoon warning' and now it was 'clear.' When she made a bright expression, Redian was quite a beautiful woman. Then Bread laid his hand on Redian's shoulder and smirked.

"I told you. We spent some adult time. Children won't understand such things."

".....Stop joking around."

Redian declared sharply but she didn't hit him like she did before. Instead she just grumbled a little bit.

'What did they do in the meantime.....?'

Ark stared at the both of them before shaking his head. Well, who cared? Ark's only concern was with his factory.

"Okay, so the alcohol here is good?"

"Ah, it is the best. Owner, alcohol and appetizers over here! "

Bread stared to order alcohol in a light voice. Ark, Buksil and Baekgu started drinking the alcohol. In a short time they all became drunk.

Diririri, diririri.

Then his phone ringtone could be heard in his ear.

“Oh, wait a minute.”

Ark asked Bread for understanding and left his unit. Then he picked up the receiver.

“O-oppa.” It’s serious! It’s a crisis! Lancel village is in a crisis!”

Roco’s voice shook his ears.

Act 9: Crisis of Lancel Village

“Is it here?”

Shambala looked at the village nestled at the foot of the mountain.

“Yes, this is it.”

No. 358 who was riding near a horse-drawn carriage nodded. Shambala had finally arrived at Lancel village after crossing the sea. The reason Shambala arrived at Lancel village was to bring the stolen goods they recovered from the pirates. Since Ark’s tip from an anonymous source was the reason they swept up the lawless port, it was agreed that 20% of the goods would be sent to Ark’s store in Lancel village. The Easter Nation swept up 50,000 gold from the pirates so 20% of it was 10,000 gold. It was so much that the carriage could barely carry it. If any thieves attacked and stole it then it would be a terrible loss. So Shambala protected the carriage while it was brought to Lancel village. But that wasn’t the only reason why Shambala came to Lancel village.

“This place is Lancel village?”

“Is this the first time you’ve seen it?”

“No, I briefly saw it a while ago. But.....”

This wasn’t the first time Shambala had seen Lancel village. When Seutandal rose a while ago, he had used the dimensional gate to transfer the Sacred Soil. There was no time to sightsee then but he had still entered the village. But now the village felt completely different from then.

“Isn’t it quite a peculiar village?”

No. 358 laughed and replied.

“Peculiar? No, it’s rather.....”

It was the epitome of an odd village. Either way, Lancel village was completely different from what Shambala remembered. It was a completely different scale from before. When Shambala first visited, it was a village surrounded by a wooden fence with barely 100 houses inside. But now the wooden fence had turned into a stone wall. The stone wall was properly built and arranged to a height of 1 metre. Along with the stone wall, the size of the village was 50% larger than before. Now it contained 200 houses. Not only was it a larger scale, it had also become stranger. Among the 200 buildings, none of them had an identical form. The shape and colour were all so different that it looked like a flower garden when seen from a faraway place. The buildings were linked like spider webs by overpasses and there was also a huge, hollow hole in the village. It was something that Shambala couldn’t understand.

“What’s with those overpasses and hole? Why are they in the village?”

“Oh, the overpass and hole?”

No. 358 looked at the places Shambala referred to and replied.

“The overpasses are made for the Meow. Do you see the Meow climbing up there to take a nap? The Meow really like high places.”

“Then the hole?”

“The raccoon clan dug that. Since they find moving in buildings troublesome, they made an underground village. The raccoons feel more comfortable in the ground.”

Lancel village also contained a embassy from Seutandal. Because of that, the political and commercial ties between Seutandal and Schudenberg ran through Lancel village. Since no. 358 had been helpful to Ark and Shambala, he had been appointed the interim manager of the embassy for the Eastern Nation. Thanks to that, he knew quite a bit about Lancel village.

“Then is that pillar somewhat significant?”

Shambala pointed towards a pillar in the centre of the village. Not only was the pillar strange, there were tents erected around it. When asked about the pillar, no. 358 just laughed.

“Ah, that pillar is to indicate the territories.”

“What? Territory indication?”

“Yes, several beast clans have moved to Lancel village recently. So when the Wolrang arrived then they decided to use the pillar to indicate the different territories. At first, they tried to use the trees around the village but that didn’t work so the mayor built a pillar.”

Shambala muttered with an absurd expression at no. 358’s explanation.

“.....This truly is a village suited to that Ark guy.”

“The good part? Or bad?”

“Of course, the bad part. Where good part does Ark have?”

No. 358 winced and raised his finger to his lips.

“I’ll tell you in advance but please don’t slander Ark in front of the residents.”

“Huh? Why do I have to watch what I say?”

“All the residents here have received help from Ark-nim. If you speak badly about Ark then you’ll be in a bit of trouble, and do you know the branch manager of Ark’s store? You must absolutely say nothing in front of her!”

“Then this is that guy Ark’s home town? That explains the atmosphere in the past.”

Shambala remembered the Seutandal war. When Haman Fortress was on the brink of destruction from the Red Man’s strike, the Lancel residents had come through the dimensional gate to help. If they hadn’t helped then the Seutandal mission might’ve been a failure. Then the Eastern Nation wouldn’t have occupied a spot in Seutandal and they would still be drifting around. So Isabel and the Eastern Nation held a soft spot for Lancel. It was also the reason why the embassy was built in Lancel.

“Well, the development speed really is awesome compared to when I first saw the village. When I was first dispatched here, it looked like a normal village but now there are several different features which bring in significant revenue. Lancel’s specialities are also a good source of revenue for Seutandal.”

No. 358 spoke proudly about the village. One speciality he was talking about was the raccoons’ swords and equipment. The raccoons were gifted artisans so the quality of their produced items was already a speciality of Lancel. Lancel village was also at the food of the Argus Mountains which had abundant magic ingredients and the Wolrang and Meow were also major specialties. And 30% of Lancel’s specialities were consumed by Seutandal. Naturally Ark’s Store in the centre of the village monopolized most of the transactions.

“.....That Ark is only good at things like this.”

Shambala snorted with a sour look.

“Some of the residents here also used to be thieves. Aside from the Meow and raccoons, there are also some orphans from the Baran clan taken in after the Seutandal war. Ah, and there is the popular dance performances by the beautiful Meow shaman Jana that is famous throughout Schudenberg. Although the relationship between the Meow and Wolrang isn’t that great.....”

No. 358 continued talking about Lancel village.

‘Damn, it’s already irritating that I have to separate from Isabel for a few days but now this guy keeps chattering. The Letter Movement tower should be built more quickly.”

Shambala ignored no. 359 and looked at the construction site in the village centre. The building being constructed was the Letter Movement tower manufactured by the Magic Institute. The royal family of Schudenberg thought it was inconvenient that the embassy was at the foot of a mountain so they decided to construct it. However, there was still a lot of time until it was completed. Meanwhile the carriage had arrived at Lancel village. The guards were familiar with no. 358 so they greeted him and allowed him to enter. There were so many people inside the village that it was difficult for the carriage to move around. The embassy was here and this was also the first place in Schudenberg where the specialties of Seutandal could be bought. While the various local specialties and merchandise of Ark’s Store, it was now an essential stopping place for a lot of level 100 users. They soon entered a residential area where the sign for Ark’s Comprehensive Store appeared.

“Hmm, this is Ark’s store?”

“Yes. Isn’t it amazing? It has only been created for 1 year but it is already one of the most famous shops around. There are so many items that it requires 2 warehouses to be rented.”

“I’ve already heard that explanation.”

No. 358 was also a part of Seutandal's tourism business. So no. 358 hadn't stopped talking until Shambala spoke sharply to him. Suddenly a pig like person ran up to him.

"Welcome. Sir?"

"Where is the store manager?"

Shambala was irritated by the talkative person so he spoke in a sharp voice. Then the pig stuttered and withdrew hesitantly.

"W-why are you looking for the store manager?"

"Why do I have to tell you anything?"

"H-have you come here to return something?"

"What? Return?"

"I-I'm right! Heok. P-please endure it! Have you come because of that sword? I might've made a little mistake while taking care of it..... Or is it a herbal medicine set I sold you? There is the risk that it will spoil if left too long....ah, no, that's not.....anyway please endure it and don't return the goods!"

"What, what the? This guy? I said let me see the branch manager!"

"Sob sob sob, please bear it for me. I might've made a mistake when selling the goods..... If the manager finds out then I'm dead, sob. Please forget it just this once. I am poor and have no money for a refund."

The pig grabbed his pants and cried. Shambala looked at the scene with astounded eyes.

"Omo, Shambala oppa?"

Suddenly a voice was heard from behind him. He saw that it was Roco when he turned around. Roco had returned after receiving some harp lessons from the ghost. After the pig saw Roco, he wiped off his tears and asked.

“Sniff, store manager. You know this person?”

“Yes. He is Ark oppa’s friend. Please enter.”

“Sheesh, I cried for no reason.”

The pig pouted and went back into the store. Shambala stared blankly at the back of the pig’s head before saying.

“What on earth? He?”

“Oh, is this the first time Oppa saw it? He is a salesperson for our store.”

“Salesperson?”

“Yes, sometimes there are people who buy items and then use an excuse to try and refund them. That person is Ulmeok who has a specialty in crying. Whenever he cries than the customer won’t want to make a return anymore. Hohohoho!”

That’s right. This store had a 0% return or refund policy. It was the secret to Ark’s store which boasted 100% customer satisfaction. Well....Shambala really had nothing to say. That Ark.....Shambala sighed. Roco then saw the carriage and asked.

“Oh, these are the stolen goods recovered from the pirate’s hideout?”

“You heard?”

“I went to Oppa’s house a few days ago and he told me to expect it with Shambala oppa.”

“Well I don’t really mind the scale of the items. If it hadn’t been for Ark then wouldn’t we have lost those guys in the middle of the pursuit? If the pirates aren’t caught than things will become difficult for Isabel.”

Roco laughed at Shambala’s words. Then Shambala frowned and asked.

“.....Why are you looking like that?”

“Hohoho, it is still hot. Isabel, Isabel, does Oppa still have that single-minded devotion?”

Roco nudged his side, causing Shambala to cough and avoid her gaze. However, the pieces of skin revealed through the mask had reddened. Shambala coughed before speaking again.

“Actually, I also have some business with you.”

“Huh? Me? What is it? Love advice?”

“Don’t joke around. I heard you are raising a unicorn?”

“I am raising it.....but why are you asking about the unicorn?”

“There is a new seal on my dagger so I haven’t been able to use it yet. I need some magic ingredients to unseal it and the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’ is one of them. But I haven’t been able to find a unicorn.”

That’s right. It was the reason why he left his beloved Isabel to come to Lancel. A while ago, Shambala had gathered all three treasures to change to his 2nd profession. It was the ‘Dark Veil’, ‘Blood Armour’ and the ‘Thousand Human Blood’ dagger. Among them, the Thousand Human Blood dagger had a strong seal on it. And special magic ingredients were needed for the ceremony to unseal it. One of them was the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’. He had found all the other magic ingredients so he came running when JusticeMan told him Roco was raising a unicorn. He explained to the surprised Roco.

“Unicorn’s Mane? Do you need all of the mane?”

“No, a handful will be enough.”

“Well, if it is that much.....”

Rocco blew a sigh of relief and nodded. In fact, the unicorn was quite sensitive these days. It was expected. Twice the unicorn experienced having its horns severed thanks to Ark. Fortunately it had grown halfway back but the unicorn still had some trauma from the memories.

If someone even sent it a little suspicious look than it would instantly run away.

‘I feel a bit sorry for Unicorn but he is Ark oppa’s friend and he only wants a little bit. Hohoho!’

“Just hold on a minute. I’ll call Unicorn and check.”

Roco smiled and answered. Shambala looked at the stolen goods loaded on the carriage and murmured aloud.

“But that guy Ark is really never tired. He provided a tip about how to get the stolen goods and he even managed to get a commission for it. He got a profit without even doing anything. Damn guy, at this rate.....”

That’s right. It was indeed Shambala! But Shambala had forgotten about no. 358’s warning. Never talk badly about Ark in Lancel village. Particularly in front of the manager of Ark’s store! Shambala was muttering to himself until he looked at Roco with a puzzled expression.

“Eh? Why? You’re not calling the unicorn?”

Roco twitched and spoke with a strange expression.

“I was too short-sighted.”

“.....?”

“The unicorn is indeed my pet. Although it will heal, I just can’t strip it of its mane. There should be a price for it.”

“A price?”

“Yes. I mean.....um.....ah. The carriage will block business to the store so Shambala oppa, please help Ulmeok transfer it to the warehouse. And you should also arrange the warehouse while you’re there. I’m so busy these days that I haven’t had time to arrange the warehouse. I will think about giving you the Unicorn’s Mane after that.”

"So you want me to bring these goods to the warehouse and then arrange it?"

"If you don't want to then that's too bad."

Roco exploded and turned around. Shambala couldn't understand why Roco's attitude had suddenly turned so cold. However no. 358 who was sitting in the carriage sighed as he noticed the reason.

"Deliverer-nim....he can only get along well with Isabel-nim....."

Shambala stared at Roco before muttering.

"The way you're handling that pig and your attitude gradually resembles Ark."

"Omo, thank you."

Roco laughed loudly with pleasure. Thus.....Shambala was forced to labour for Roco. Suddenly there was an uproar above him as the Meow jumped through the overpass and shouted.

"Damn, it happened again!"

"Those bastards, where on earth are they hiding?"

"Those mice, when I caught them I'll tear them to pieces!"

Then Roco ran to the Meow with a surprised expression and asked.

"What's wrong? Perhaps.....?"

"Eh Roco, ah, yes. 3 of the Meow encountered them this time!"

'The Meow encountered?'

Shambala sensed that a serious problem was occurring and looked at no. 359 but he just shook his head. Shambala jumped off the carriage and approached Roco.

"What's going on?"

“That.....”

Roco hesitated for a while before explaining. In fact, an incident had occurred in Lancel village a few days ago. While the ex-thieves were patrolling, the Meow and Wolrang who had been looking for magic ingredients were killed. Initially it was just one or two people, but it had occurred more frequently until three or four people were killed at once in a matter of days. The mayor Galen had covered up the incident for the moment. If the visitors and residents found out then the lively village would become confused and worried. So the guards had been secretly investigating the incident. But they still hadn't managed to find the killers.

“They don't seem like simple thieves.....”

Roco murmured with a stiff expression. Several members of the beast clans and the guards had been killed around the village. Normally NPC thieves wouldn't go so close to a village. But it was also difficult to think that the attackers were users. The reason why users normally PKed was to get money and goods. However, the residents of Lancel village killed were NPCs. NPCs had an incredibly low probability of dropping items. In addition, the guards only wore basic equipment and the Meow didn't have any. The increase in chaotic value when killing an NPC was also much higher compared to killing a user. In other words, there was no profit in killing NPCs.

“Should I check it out?”

Shambala asked after thinking for a while.

“Huh? Shambala oppa?”

“It is better than me moving the baggage. I am a professional.”

“Ah, that's right. Shambala oppa is a brutal assassin so you would also understand assassins!”

“Do you have to say it that way? Anyway, will you give it to me if I resolve this?”

“The Unicorn’s Mane? I understand. Since Lancel village isn’t profitable when everybody feels uneasy.”

“Okay, no 358. The warehouse arrangement is up to you!”

“Huh? Huh? Huh?”

Shambala forced the work onto no. 358 and left the village. There were two reasons why Shambala offered to do this task. The first reason was that he preferred fighting unknown enemies to carrying goods. And the second reason was because he guessed where they could be hiding.

‘I have to find them quickly and return to Seutandal.’

Shambala used the skill he learned after changing professions and searched around the village. Shambala didn’t encounter them often but he knew about the beast clans’ abilities. Just like their name, the NPCs had several animal like abilities. While the raccoons could dig tunnels, the Meow and Wolrang had a keen sense of smell. If the members of the beast clans couldn’t find the scent after several days then they must’ve been using skills to hide their trail.

‘But they are hiding near the village. Hiding in a remote place and then coming to the village to kill is a lot more dangerous. If that appears then the residents might notice them. And they could hide and watch for when the guards mobilized.’

If they wanted to monitor the village and hide from the beast clans’ keen sense of smell then there was only one place.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Shambala reached a waterfall that wasn’t that far from Lancel village. The reason the beast clans couldn’t find them was because they moved through the water. So the only hiding place possible was the waterfall.

‘Huhuhu, indeed.....!’

As expected, he found a small cave where he searched around the waterfall.

‘If they only killed three or four NPCs at one time then there should just be 10 of them. But I can’t be sure so I should take a look at the situation.’

Shambala used Stealth and entered the cave. The entrance was small but inside it was quite deep and wide. After he walked around 10 metres, he suddenly heard people talking.

“Kukuku, the village should be in an uproar by now.”

“No, not necessarily.”

“The guy who infiltrated the village said that the guards are keeping it quiet. But the atmosphere is gradually becoming worse.”

‘Users? They’re not NPC thieves?’

Shambala hid himself near the entrance and surveyed the interior. In the spacious area, 8 men were sitting around. When he used Penetration on them, he confirmed that their names were deeply red-black. In order to become so chaotic, they must’ve been the users who killed the inhabitants of Lancel village.

‘Why on earth are they killing the residents of Lance village?’

At that moment one chaotic user sighed and murmured.

“Hey, aren’t we somewhat stupid?”

“What?”

“Deliberately raising our chaotic level just to learn the death skill. If we’re caught then we’ll be in prison for at least two months.”

“That is true. But we’re doing it because of the guild.”

‘Death skill? Guild?’

Usually when Penetration was activated, the name of the user and the guild would be shown together. However no guild names appeared on the chaotic users. They must've temporarily withdrew from the guild to commit the murders. But the reason they were killing NPCs was to learn the death skill? What did that mean? Then they started to talk again.

"There's no need to worry. We're not the only suicide group. If all the people selected to be a part of the suicide group by our guild participates then we'll stack up the chaotic value. The guild has also promised to support us if this strategy works."

'Suicide group? Wait.....then these guys.....!'

Shambala had experienced the strange skill they were talking about before.

'Self-destruct.' It was literally a skill which exploded the character to deal enormous damage. But Self-destruct wasn't a skill that could be learnt using normal methods. The only way to learn Self-destruct was to build up the chaotic value until it reached a certain amount and then visit a NPC in a secret society to learn it.

'That's right. This is the reason why they killed the residents. Killing NPCs instead of users will increase the chaotic value faster. But why are they going so far just to learn Self-destruct? And this is the strategy of a guild.....'

However, the chaotic users had stopped talking.

'Anyway, I can't just let them keep killing residents.'

Shambala left the cave and went back to the village. He then informed Mayor Galen about the meeting. The beast clan members instantly ran wild in the street. However Shambala shook his head.

"Those guys will just rise again 24 hours after you kill them and repeat the same actions. The only way to prevent it is to have the guards kill them. Lancel village is a part of Jackson. If the guards kill the chaotic users then they'll automatically be locked in the jail at Jackson. Since

they've killed many residents, they'll be locked in the jail for at least two months. And they're chaotic values will return to normal so they can't acquire the Self-destruct skill anymore."

'It is better to not strike their hiding place directly.'

After that Shambala used Stealth to watch the cave. When they appeared to hunt the next day, the NPC guards surrounded them in an ambush.

"Now, surround and exterminate them!"

"These bastards, I'll repay my colleagues' grudges!"

The guards swung their swords and rushed to attack.

"Heok! How did the guards.....?"

The chaotic users were level 250. However, the 8 of them couldn't deal with the 30 guards surrounding them. Apart from Shambala, the Meow and Wolrang also attacked to get their revenge. Of course they allowed the guards to deal the final blow in order to lock them in jail.

"You're dead!"

"Grrrrr, take this!"

"Go, clear my family's grudge!"

At Shambala's command, the beast clans beat them up before allowing the guards to kill them. Thus it took only 5 minutes to wipe the chaotic users out. Now they would rot in a prison cell in Jackson. But Shambala still felt uncomfortable.

'Those guys are dealt with. But I haven't figured out the reason why the guild wants to learn the Self-destruct skill. It might be needless worry, but if it is somehow related to Lancel village.....'

Lancel village was also important to Seutandal. If a serious problem occurred in Lancel village then the effects would even cross into Seutandal.

‘There are still a few days left before I need to return to Seutandal. Then I can return when the Letter Movement tower is finished. Yes. I’ll stay here and watch the situation a bit more.’

Shambala sensed something sinister so he stayed in Lancel and checked the area. He would sometimes visit the waterfall cave while hunting. Since the chaotic players used the cave as their hideout, Shambala expected their colleagues to visit there. After a couple of days, Shambala’s ominous prediction turned into reality. No, the reality exceeded Shambala’s worries.

“Those morons, they were caught and locked in jail! Luckily the other squads in the area were successful and managed to achieve a sufficient number.”

There were as many as 300 users gathered in the waterfall cave. They all had high chaotic numbers from killing NPCs in villages near Lancel. Judging by the situation, they had already learnt Self-destruct. The fact that they were gathered here meant Lancel village was their goal!

‘And those guys.....!’

Shambala stared at the man standing in front.

Shambala didn’t need to use Penetration to know their name and guild.

‘Jewel....then the ones behind this.....’

The Hermes alliance!

“As you know already, we lost the lawless port so we are in a crisis. The guild is in such a state thanks to Ark. Lancel village is just like his home base. The Hermes alliance will annihilate Lancel village. Our main goals are Ark’s store and the Letter Movement tower.”

Jewel eloquently spoke towards the other guild members.

“But our mission doesn’t end with Lancel village. Our final goal is to recapture Seutandal. We are the hidden forces of the Hermes alliance

selflessly devoting ourselves to recapturing Seutandal. Therefore the Hermes alliance has spent enormous time and money to support us in our efforts to recapture Seutandal!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The alliance members lifted their swords and shouted.

"I've received word from Duke and the troops he is leading. Their estimated time of arrival is 3 days. Once the support troops arrive, we will commence the operation to annihilate Lancel village."

Shambala realized the situation was even worse than he expected.

'That Ark, he allowed the Hermes alliance to find out about Lancel village? Ah, that's right. The dimensional gate..... Anyway, those Hermes guys have made up their minds and aimed at Lancel so it is serious. Furthermore, their end goal is Seutandal! But the troops in Lancel don't have any hope of stopping those guys. I need to contact Ark immediately to prepare countermeasures.'

Shambala realized the urgency of the situation. He instantly used Stealth to leave the cave. The news was then conveyed to Ark through Roco. And after two days.....

"Those Hermes alliance bastards!"

Ark flew from Paradon in Bristania to Giran using Letter Movement and finally arrived in Lancel village. However, Ark wasn't alone. Accompanying Ark was Bread and Redian, Bristania's strongest combination. So Lancel village was surrounded and the 3rd part of the battle against the Hermes alliance begun.

TO BE CONTINUED